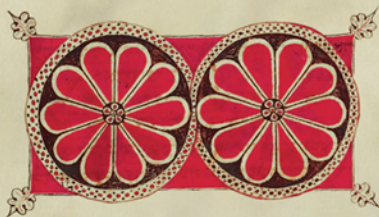




Walking on the Water

READING MT. 14:22-33 IN THE LIGHT
OF ITS *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE*



RACHEL NICHOLLS

BRILL

Walking on the Water

Biblical Interpretation Series

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Walking on the Water

Reading Mt. 14:22–33 in the Light of its *Wirkungsgeschichte*

By

Rachel Nicholls



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2008

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISSN 0928-0731

ISBN 978 90 04 16374 4

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

For
my father Nigel and late mother Margery
and
all my fathers and mothers in the faith

Standing on the shoulders of giants

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
<i>Matthew 14:22–33—Nestle-Aland 27th Edition and NRSV</i>	xii
 Chapter One Introduction to the Project and a Description of <i>Wirkungsgeschichte</i>	 1
 Chapter Two A Historical Critical Examination of Mt 14:22–33	 29
 Chapter Three A Literary Critical Examination of Mt 14:22–33	 73
 Chapter Four ‘Effects’ of Mt 14:22–33 in some Nineteenth-Century Theological Texts	 99
 Chapter Five Some Visual ‘Effects’ of Mt 14:22–33	 127
 Chapter Six Conclusion	 187
 Abstract	 201
 Bibliography	 203
 Subject and Author Index	 215
 Biblical Index	 218

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Illustration 1: 'Walking on the Water' fresco from Dura Europus
- Illustration 2: Tracing of the lower figure from Dura Europus
- Illustration 3: The marble bas-relief by the Master of Cabestany
- Illustration 4: Duccio's *Appearance on Lake Tiberias*
- Illustration 5: The *Navicella* mosaic, St. Peter's, Rome
- Illustration 6: Christina Saj's *Walking on Water*, 1997
- Illustration 7: *Jonah in the Belly of the Beast*, 1994
- Illustration 8: *Don Quixote—the Barefoot Warrior*, 1997
- Illustration 9: *Nerukotvorna "not made by human hands"*, 1998
- Illustration 10: *Transfiguration*, 2000
- Illustration 11: *Descent into Limbo*, 1999

Colour images of the majority of the works of art referred to in the text can be found on the internet by making an image search using the title of the painting or artefact.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Professor Graham Stanton for the help and support which he has given me over a number of years which has made this project possible. He introduced me to the very concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* and supervised me with great patience and kindness through the early drafts of what eventually became four chapters of this dissertation.

I am also very grateful to Dr. James Carleton Paget, who supervised me for the final year of this project and encouraged me through all the final stages to its completion.

The History of Art discussions in *Chapter Five* would not have reached their present form without the helpful comments and support of Vivien Perutz and Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash. Many thanks.

MATTHEW 14:22-33, NESTLE-ALAND 27TH EDITION

- 22 καὶ εὐθέως ἠνάγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ
προάγειν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πέραν, ἕως οὗ ἀπολύσῃ τοὺς ὄχλους.
- ”23 καὶ ἀπολύσας τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος κατ’ ἰδίαν προσεύ-
ξασθαι. ὥστιάς δὲ γενομένης μόνος ἦν ἐκεῖ.
- ”24 τὸ δὲ πλοῖον ἦδη σταδίους πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀπεῖχεν βασα-
νιζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων, ἦν γὰρ ἐναντίος ὁ ἄνεμος.
- ”25 τετάρτη δὲ φυλακῇ τῆς νυκτὸς ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ
τὴν θάλασσαν.
- ”26 οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα
ἐταράχθησαν λέγοντες ὅτι φάντασμα ἐστίν, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου
ἔκραξαν.
- 27 εὐθὺς δὲ ἐλάλησεν [ὁ Ἰησοῦς] αὐτοῖς λέγων· θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι·
μὴ φοβεῖσθε.
- ”28 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν· κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ, κέλευσόν με
ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σε ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα.
- ”29 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ἐλθέ. καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ πλοίου [ὁ] Πέτρος περι-
πάτησεν ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα καὶ ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν.
- ”30 βλέπων δὲ τὸν ἄνεμον [ἰσχυρὸν] ἐφοβήθη, καὶ ἄρξάμενος κατα-
ποντίζεσθαι ἔκραξεν λέγων· κύριε, σῶσόν με.
- ”31 εὐθέως δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκτείνας τὴν χειρὰ ἐπελάβετο αὐτοῦ καὶ
λέγει αὐτῷ· ὀλιγόπιστε, εἰς τί ἐδίστασας;
- ”32 καὶ ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος.
- ”33 οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ λέγοντες· ἀληθῶς θεοῦ
υἱὸς εἶ.

MATTHEW 14:22–33, NRSV

- 22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.
- 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,
- 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.
- 25 And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the sea.
- 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying,
“It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.
- 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”
- 28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”
- 29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus.
- 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”
- 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him,
“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”
- 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.
- 33 And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT AND A DESCRIPTION OF *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE*

INTRODUCTION

It is a symptom of our uncertain postmodern times that established methods or procedures in any discipline are increasingly questioned. New Testament Studies has not been immune from this process, with a renewed interest in hermeneutical issues giving rise to a proliferation of new methods. The main areas of criticism are now historical, literary and sociological.¹ These are supplemented by a number of methods which explore the questions raised by a particular group of readers, such as feminist, marxist, post-colonial or queer theory readings. We have reached a point, however, where plurality may become pluralism; where rival and irreconcilable readings of a text will exist side by side without hope of the kind of discussion across methods which could lead to more holistic and coherent interpretations.²

Some critics look back nostalgically to the time when New Testament scholars were asking the same questions at least, even though they arrived at different answers.³ The questions asked are now so diverse that a great deal of friction is generated in the defence of a particular set of questions as primary for interpretation and the condemnation of another set as irrelevant.⁴ The conflict is often most intense between literary critics on one side and sociological and historical critics on the

¹ I use the broader term 'sociological' as opposed to the narrower 'social-scientific' on the basis that not all critics with a sociological outlook espouse the model-based social-scientific approach commended by the Context Group, e.g. Esler, 1995:4–8. For a wider view, see especially discussion in Horrell, 1996:10f.

² See Kingsbury, 1985:85, who despairs of further discussions with David Hill (who criticized Kingsbury's literary approach), and says that the matter must be left for others to judge. Also Bockmuehl, 1998:273–275.

³ E.g. see Ashton, 1994:186–187.

⁴ E.g. see Ashton, 1994:203 on 'deconstruction', "—the real thing is no bogey; it is rather a demon..." see also Malina and Neyrey 1988:136, "We argue that a social science approach is vitally important, if only because it frees biblical study from the tyranny of the spuriously obvious and self-evident."

other, because sociological and historical methods are more closely allied in approach.⁵

This conflict is often marked by exasperation,⁶ as if both parties were staring at the classic optical illusion of the young woman and the old woman and one was saying, "It's a young woman!" only to hear the other reply, "How can you say that? It is obviously an old woman! Look, there is her nose!" Rivalry occurs because the same black line within the total drawing is seen by both observers, but is claimed as evidence for a different picture. In the same way, a variation in style in a Gospel passage, for example, may be observed by a historical critic and a literary one; to the first it will appear to be a sure indication of a change of source, to the second it will be a sign of stylistic skill and subtlety.⁷ The same evidence is cited to defend different conclusions: the literary critic sees the evangelist as a consummate artist presenting a story, the historical critic sees a significant part of the evangelist's work as compiling and adapting sources which are still detectable as an earlier layer of tradition within the finished Gospel.⁸

Who is right? The argument continues fiercely because the very bases of these two approaches are at stake here: the literary critic relies on the Gospel being a coherent narrative in order to justify a close examination of the Evangelist's literary art;⁹ the historical and indeed the social-scientific critic rely on the gospel being a considerably less well-polished artefact, so that evidence of earlier sources and concerns, of which the Evangelist was not conscious¹⁰ while writing, can be discovered behind the text.

⁵ E.g. see Horrell, 1996:26 who asserts that there is no essential difference in method between sociology and history. He therefore opposes the distinctions made by some critics between historical and social-scientific criticism. See also Esler, 1995:3, commenting on interpreting the NT, "—we must comprehend their contexts, the particular social scenarios... This inevitably means that New Testament interpretation will be historical in nature."

⁶ E.g. Ashton, 1994:141, "—narrative criticism is more of a fad than a fashion."

⁷ E.g. comments on John 6: see Culpepper, 1983:91, "The conflict with unbelief escalates in chapter 6." vs. Ashton, 1993:200, "Chapter 6 is a later insertion... This view can be supported from internal evidence."

⁸ E.g. see Kermode, 1979:68, commenting on different views of the ending of Mark's Gospel, "The conclusion [of Mark] is either intolerably clumsy; or it is incredibly subtle. One distinguished scholar, dismissing this latter option, says it presupposes "a degree of originality which would invalidate the whole method of form criticism." [from W.L. Knox, quoted in Taylor, *St. Mark*]

⁹ See e.g. Howell, 1990:33.

¹⁰ See e.g. White, 1986:85–88.

It is tempting, in the face of such mutual hostility between critics, to attempt a reconciliation by saying that they are all correct, and that their approaches can be held as complementary. This complementarity is sometimes fruitfully achieved within the work of one scholar,¹¹ but the larger critical task of bringing different methods into dialogue is rarely addressed. If the Gospels can be read in a number of rival and even mutually contradictory ways, then it will ultimately be fruitless to develop these approaches in isolation from one another. To follow a route of parallel and separate development risks placing procedural purity ahead of more fundamental issues of understanding.¹² The alternative to addressing these deep questions is an increasing proliferation of isolated methods; a postmodern pluralism of voices without dialogue.

Into this scene of increasingly specialized approaches comes a relatively new procedure termed *Wirkungsgeschichte*. *Wirkungsgeschichte* has been translated as ‘the history of influence’, or ‘the history of effects’.¹³ The term has then been applied to the compiling of a description of the ‘effects’ of a particular text. This compilation encompasses a wider range of material than would be included in a history of interpretation, for instance, which traditionally focuses on commentaries and sermons.¹⁴ The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a biblical text includes commentaries and sermons, but also extends to letters, sculptures, paintings, proverbial sayings, cartoons, hymns and lyrics, even jokes and graffiti—in fact anything which can be shown to be an ‘effect’ of the text.¹⁵ It is, by its very nature, multi-disciplinary and wide-ranging.

¹¹ See e.g. Barton, 1994, especially 1994:19f. for a methodological explanation of his approach.

¹² This struggle is also apparent in other disciplines, see Kermode the literary critic quoting Ricoeur the philosopher, “Can we find ourselves,” I ask with Paul Ricoeur, “a position between, on the one hand, a methodological fanaticism which would forbid us to understand anything besides the method we practice, and, on the other, a feeble eclecticism which would exhaust itself in inglorious compromise?” Kermode, 1979:80. See also Bockmuehl, 1998:274–275.

¹³ Gadamer 1989, (trans. revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall), and Luz 1990b, (trans.) Wilhelm C. Linss.

¹⁴ E.g. references to Patristic and Reformation texts as per I.C. Commentaries, e.g. Plummer, 1981 (first published 1896).

¹⁵ The issue of criteria for designating something an ‘effect’ is discussed below on pp. 21–22.

See also Ebeling, 1968:28, “—interpretation of Holy Scripture does not find expression only in preaching and doctrine, and certainly not primarily in commentaries; but also in doing and suffering.”

A debt is owed to Ulrich Luz for introducing this concept to New Testament studies through his work on Matthew's Gospel.¹⁶ Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland acknowledge this in the Preface to their commentary on Revelation,¹⁷ the first volume of the new Blackwell Bible Commentaries, a series devoted to "—the reception history of the Bible."¹⁸ Anthony Thiselton's commentary on 1 Corinthians is another English language contribution in this area.¹⁹ Within the last year, new seminar groups have sprung up at the British New Testament Conference²⁰ and at the European Conference of the Society of Biblical Literature²¹ devoted to enhancing the interpretation of Biblical texts through the examination of aspects of their influence or 'effects'.

Not all scholars working in this innovative area would recognise or accept the term *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a description of their work. Some begin their studies on the influence of a Biblical passage with the questions and priorities of another discipline entirely. The historian who studies the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text looks at the implications of the historical changes in interpretation. Examples of this kind of study are Richard Trexler's inspiring work on the story of the Magi or Norman Cohn's work on Noah's flood.²² The more that differing interpretations fan out from the text in different historical periods, the more pleased such a historian will be. This is because the more interpretations there are, the more the historian is enabled to uncover the events, ideas and pressures which gave rise to the changes. Examining the interpretation of the text is simply a lens through which to conduct a broader historical study.

¹⁶ See e.g. Luz, 1985; 1990a; 1990b; 1994; 1996.

¹⁷ See Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:xiii. Contemporary reviews of the first volume (and its translation) suggest that his innovative approach was not immediately recognised as the most distinctive feature of his work. For instance, Schuyler Brown takes issue with Luz's view of the Matthean community and Powell criticizes him for taking no account of narrative criticism. See Brown, 1987; Powell, 1991.

¹⁸ See Kovacs and Rowland, 2004 on Revelation; Edwards, 2004 on John. Forthcoming volumes include commentaries on seventeen Old Testament books and five more New Testament ones.

¹⁹ See Thiselton, 2000. Thiselton's discussion of 'effects' remains within the conventional bounds of the history of interpretation—Patristic, Medieval and Reformation sermons, treatises and commentaries—the exception is his discussion of modern works of systematic theology. He does not discuss any 'effects' in media other than texts.

²⁰ Called 'New Testament: Use and Influence', it began in September 2003.

²¹ Called 'The Bible and Its Influence: History and Impact', it began in July 2003.

²² See Trexler, 1997; Cohn, 1996.

Other authors working in this area are Biblical scholars intent on interpreting Scripture, but whose studies in a different discipline have alerted them to the potential narrowness of current Biblical criticism. They have no prior commitment to the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a theory, but study some ‘effects’ of the text to ease the short-sightedness of more conventional approaches. One example of this kind of work is Yvonne Sherwood’s book on Jonah,²³ which draws on her interests in Jewish Studies, Cultural Studies, Literature and Art. Another example is Gary Anderson’s book on Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian imagination.²⁴ An impressive contribution is Margaret Mitchell’s work on the Pauline interpretation of John Chrysostom.²⁵ This is a beautifully detailed work on Chrysostom in which Mitchell suggests that looking at Chrysostom’s use of portraits of Paul opens up hermeneutical questions about the essential tasks and practice of exegesis in any age.²⁶ This use of ‘effects’ to open up a three-way conversation between the ‘effect’, the present-day reader and the text is part of the aim of this project.

Some Biblical scholars, on the other hand, do work with an overt theory of *Wirkungsgeschichte* and base their ideas on the work of Hans Jauss, a literary critic.²⁷ His preferred term is ‘reception history’ (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*), the history which he uses in a method called *Rezeptionsästhetik*, translated as ‘the aesthetics of reception’.²⁸ His aim, in his most influential work *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), is to rehabilitate literary history within the discipline of literary studies where it had become discredited and regarded as irrelevant to the interpretation of texts. In *Question and Answer* (1989), Jauss makes a distinction between theological and aesthetic interpretations, suggesting that theological hermeneutics grant a superiority to the question posed by the text to the reader, whereas aesthetic hermeneutics give priority to the interpreter’s

²³ See Sherwood, 2000.

²⁴ See Anderson, 2001. Anderson commits himself to a task similar to the task of *Wirkungsgeschichte* as it is understood within this project: “I have sought a way of combining what we know about the Bible’s history of composition (the historical-critical method proper) with its history of reception (the history of interpretation).” Anderson, 2001:xv.

²⁵ See Mitchell, 2000.

²⁶ See Mitchell, 2000:410–11.

²⁷ E.g. Thiselton, 2000:xvii. He describes his approach as comparing the core of continuity within tradition with more disruptive paradigms introduced by fresh hermeneutical questions; this gives, “—a dialectic between textual controls or constraints and interpretative creativity.”

²⁸ See Jauss, 1982:viii.

own questions.²⁹ In other words, Biblical criticism done within a theological context is anxious to understand the claims made by the text on the reader, whereas literary criticism done with an aesthetic aim is content to appreciate the text and reflect on the critic's own response. The interpretation of a sacred text always aims at some form of appropriation (even if this is the repudiation of earlier appropriations), a factor not directly under consideration in purely aesthetic approaches. This distinction in the tasks normally undertaken by literary critics and biblical ones suggests that the method developed by Jauss may not be as directly applicable to Biblical Studies as some scholars have implied;³⁰ at least, not without further discussion.³¹ However, Jauss' work remains an interesting and influential example of the translation of a theory of *Wirkungsgeschichte* into critical practice.

In the present, rather mixed, scene of rival theory and divergent practice, I have chosen to go back to the philosophical roots of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. I have grounded my approach to the critical task in his thinking. The concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* did not originate under the umbrella of any particular critical method, but began as a philosophical idea about the nature of reading. The aim of this chapter is to explore what this idea is, what benefits it can offer interpreters of the New Testament, how it relates to other methods of interpretation, and what its pitfalls might be.

DEFINING *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE*

The term *Wirkungsgeschichte* is first used by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his work *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. As the title indicates, this book is not a practical manual of interpretation

²⁹ See Jauss, 1989:66.

³⁰ E.g. Thiselton, 2000:xvii. His theoretical appeal to Jauss is not matched by his practice: he lists 'effects' with judgements as to whether they are close to or distant from Paul's own thought, not allowing them to alter his initial interpretation of the text. See e.g. pp. 331, 531, 1309. He also gives no consideration to how parts of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* might be affecting what he recognises as 'Pauline'; his notion of what is Pauline seems to be derived entirely from his historical critical work.

³¹ There is a case to be made for the importance of aesthetics within theology; see Von Balthasar, 1982. Yet he, like Jauss, comments, "—no well-wrought image has been placed in the Bible solely for the sake of aesthetic contemplation; images and analogies are there to kindle life and decision." Von Balthasar, 1982:209.

but a philosophical work on the nature of hermeneutics.³² Consequently, *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not used to describe a practical task—something to do to texts, but rather it is intended to be a description of the way things are. *Wirkungsgeschichte* is a philosophical term which is used to define the process of reading and understanding. In using it as a label for a particular procedure in studying a text, we are pressing it into active service. There is, however, something ironic about this, since Gadamer himself is very suspicious of the prescriptive conventions of method.³³ There is a need, therefore, to delineate the relationship between the philosophy and the procedure in order to show to what extent we are following Gadamer's thought, and to what extent departing from it.³⁴

Describing the process of interpreting a text is very difficult. It immediately involves some large but elusive questions such as 'What is understanding and what makes it possible?' Just behind questions like these are others such as 'How does the passing of history affect understanding?' Gadamer uses a number of metaphors and terms to expound his description of the process of reading—in particular, he uses the metaphor of 'the horizon'. This term is adopted and adapted from Heidegger and Husserl.

It has now become almost a cliché in discussions of biblical hermeneutics to refer to 'horizons'. In particular, Gadamer's phrase "the fusing of horizons"³⁵ (*Horizontverschmelzung*) has become a kind of shorthand for referring to the moment in which an individual connects with a text in a life-changing manner.³⁶ This reference does reflect part of Gadamer's metaphor, because he is concerned to stress that application

³² Cf. Gadamer's comment in the preface to the second German edition: "My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing." Gadamer, 1989:xxviii (Gadamer, 1975:xvi).

³³ E.g. Gadamer, 1989:xxi (Gadamer, 1975:xxvii), "The hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all." See also Ricoeur, 1981:60, "The question is to what extent the work deserves to be called Truth AND Method, and whether it ought not instead to be entitled Truth OR Method."

³⁴ This is especially important because—"We are not saying, then, that the history of effect must be developed as a new independent discipline ancillary to the human sciences, but that we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work." Gadamer, 1989:301 (Gadamer, 1975:285).

³⁵ See Gadamer, 1989:304–307 (Gadamer, 1975:287–290).

³⁶ E.g. Bockmuehl, 1995:58.

is an integral part of interpretation.³⁷ However, his use of the term ‘horizon’ carries many more implications than this. It is worth examining it in greater detail because it is a key part of his exposition of *Wirkungsgeschichte* and *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* (historically effected consciousness).

The metaphor of the horizon implies seeing, distance and flexibility. Gadamer does not use the term simply to describe someone’s own thoughts or ideas, but rather the total extent of what someone can envision from a particular point in space and time. He speaks of the difficulty of achieving a horizon of understanding—of developing a sense of perspective.³⁸ Gadamer does not assume that everyone can see this far. Someone who is able to look to the horizon realises that not everything belongs to the familiar setting of here and now. Conversely, the person who has not developed the ability to look to the horizon naively assumes that nothing is really different or ‘other’; they ‘overvalue the near’.³⁹ By this we can see that one of Gadamer’s aims in using the term ‘horizon’ is to preserve historical distance and difference, not to minimize it.

It would therefore be a mistake to equate the next stage in Gadamer’s argument, ‘the fusing of horizons’ with other metaphors which simply evoke a sense of merging with the text. For instance, Barth’s description, in the preface to the second edition of his commentary on Romans, of Calvin’s work as wrestling with the text “—till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent!”⁴⁰ is not an equivalent expression.⁴¹ This description of a kind of hermeneutical DIY is quite different from Gadamer’s use of the metaphor of horizon: to bring something within the same horizon is not the same as making it an extension of your house. To equate the two metaphors would be to make the mistake of using the term ‘horizon’ as if it referred to an

³⁷ See Gadamer, 1989:308 (Gadamer, 1975:291). See also Steiner, 1989:7, who follows a similar line—“I shall try to elucidate hermeneutics as defining the enactment of answerable understanding, of active apprehension.”

³⁸ See Gadamer, 1989:302 (Gadamer, 1975:286).

³⁹ See Gadamer, 1989:302 (Gadamer, 1975:286).

⁴⁰ Barth, 1933:7.

⁴¹ Thiselton describes this as “a fusion of horizons in which any tension [between the text and the present] is covered up,” Thiselton, 1980:317. Since the metaphor of the horizon is used by Gadamer to preserve historical distance rather than to collapse it, it seems to me better to maintain a clear distinction between this statement of Barth’s and Gadamer on this aspect of hermeneutics.

individual's internal world rather than precisely what that individual can perceive of the outer world.⁴²

So what is 'the fusing of horizons'? In order to make sense of this expression, we have to realise that in Gadamer's thought there is really only one horizon:

Everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon (*ein einziger Horizont*).⁴³

This historical horizon constantly shifts through time and space according to where the viewer is standing. The pattern that one perceives and defines as 'the Enlightenment', for instance, is quite different as viewed by an observer from within the horizon of the beginning of the 1900's, than it is as seen within the shifted horizon at the end of the twentieth century. The actual events, texts and artefacts of 'the Enlightenment' do not need to change at all in order to produce this effect, nor do they need to be viewed in a different selection. They are simply framed, by the horizon, into a different pattern. The pattern which surrounds an event, text or artefact of the past and makes it intelligible in the present is its *Wirkungsgeschichte*; in other words, its heritage of interpretation which has shifted and developed under successive pressures and influences. The struggles of past interpreters do not entirely disappear but often live on in a heritage of unseen assumptions and unvoiced anxieties which continue to colour interpretation.

Yet if there is only one horizon, which is simply perceived as being in different places, where does the notion of a second horizon fit in to the discussion at all? Gadamer poses the question himself:

If, however, there is no such thing as these distinct horizons [the present horizon and the historical horizon], why do we speak of the fusion of horizons and not simply of the formation of the one horizon, whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition?⁴⁴

He answers:

⁴² See Ricoeur, 1991:96—"appropriation [of a text] does not imply any direct congeniality of one soul with another. Nothing is less intersubjective or dialogical than the encounter with a text; what Gadamer calls the 'fusion of horizons' expresses the convergence of the *world* horizons of the writer and the reader."

⁴³ Gadamer, 1989:304 (Gadamer, 1975:288).

⁴⁴ Gadamer, 1989:306 (Gadamer, 1975:290).

Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out. This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to *project* a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present.⁴⁵ [italics mine]

The second or 'historical' horizon, then, is not perceived in itself but projected or made distinct out of the material within the one horizon. It is a scholarly ruse, an act of the imagination to preserve the 'tension between the text and the present.' It follows that 'the fusing of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*) is not the bringing together of two separate and fixed entities, the present and the past,⁴⁶ but the snapping back of an imagined projection into its rightful place within the one horizon at the moment of understanding.

The idea of two horizons is only a temporary stage in the process of interpretation. The second horizon snaps back to a place within the single historical horizon just as surely as a piece of released elastic snaps back to its original shape.⁴⁷ There is a distinction between these two metaphors, however: this process of the separation and then recombining of horizons has altered the pattern contained within the one horizon to such an extent that it can be termed a fusion. This essential act of the imagination has re-ordered what was already known so that it is now seen and experienced differently. The potential impact of this action should not be underestimated: just because it takes place within the thoughts and perceptions of the interpreter (where else can interpretation take place?) it is not a fanciful act of the imagination but an active engagement with the material within the interpreter's own horizon.

⁴⁵ Gadamer, 1989:306. "—eines historischen Horizontes, der sich von dem Gegenwartshorizont unterscheidet," Gadamer, 1975:290.

⁴⁶ See Gadamer, 1989:304 (Gadamer, 1975:288), "Is it a correct description of the art of historical understanding to say that we learn to transpose ourselves into alien horizons? ... Is the horizon of one's own present time ever closed in this way, and can a historical situation be imagined that has this kind of closed horizon? Or is this ... a kind of Robinson Crusoe dream of historical enlightenment?"

⁴⁷ This description is a departure from Thiselton's view on the fusing of horizons: I see it as both inevitable and necessary, he describes it as impossible in practice, but a goal which one works towards. See Thiselton, 1980:xix. He also speaks of "two sets of horizons", implying that the horizon of the past and the horizon of the present are of the same order. See Thiselton, 1980:168.

In Gadamer's words:

Projecting a historical horizon, then, is only one phase in the process of understanding; it does not become solidified into the self-alienation of past consciousness (*der Selbstentfremdung eines vergangenen Bewußtseins*), but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding, a real fusion of horizons (*eine wirkliche Horizontverschmelzung*) occurs—which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded (*die mit dem Entwurf des historischen Horizontes zugleich dessen Aufhebung vollbringt*). To bring about this fusion (*Verschmelzung*) in a regulated way (*den kontrollierten Vollzug*) is the task of what we call historically effected consciousness (*des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins*).⁴⁸

Perhaps an example might illustrate how this process works. I have been thinking about the portrayal of Peter in Matthew's Gospel. To assist my reflections, I have been reading a number twentieth century works on the issues surrounding Peter's portrayal in the New Testament. It has surprised me how many of these accounts of Peter seem to centre on issues of power and authority. This reading and reflection could be seen as the first step in gaining a horizon on the questions I was considering.

This led me to think about my own impressions of Peter's character. I realised that the descriptions of Peter that I have heard in preaching and story-telling have always centred on the idea that Peter is headstrong, impetuous and a rather weak but lovable character. The impression given is that if someone like Peter could become an apostle and be called 'the rock', then there was hope for the rest of us! It suddenly occurred to me that this reading of Peter's character might not be as self-evident from the NT texts as I had always assumed. Realising that my own tradition about Peter was *a tradition* and not simply self-evidently the way things are, was the result of having a wider horizon and so no longer 'over-valuing the near.'

It further occurred to me that this weak picture of Peter might have originated as a Protestant and Evangelical defence against the idea of Peter as an authority figure, as he appears within the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions. In formulating this thought, which took some weeks to surface fully, I was projecting a historical horizon. I was imagining myself standing in a different place, where the horizon encompassed much sharper issues of ecclesiastical authority and divisions

⁴⁸ Gadamer, 1989:306–7 (Gadamer, 1975:290).

of tradition than they do today, and where a portrayal of Peter as an anti-hero might serve a more than devotional purpose. As soon as I imagined this scenario, my relationship to my previous understanding of Peter had shifted—my present horizon and my projected horizon had fused. The result was a desire to look for further evidence on the issue: to go back to the New Testament and re-examine it and also to ferret out the origins of the portrait of the ‘weak Peter’ to see if my supposition is borne out.

This description of an instance of ‘the fusing of horizons’ may seem rather tame. Someone might object that it is simply a description of what happens when one reads and thinks; and these are surely both processes that we can undertake without the benefit of Gadamer’s philosophy. If the description resembles humdrum and everyday processes, however, so much the better: the very elusiveness of the philosophy of hermeneutics lies in the fact that it involves putting into words what we all do without stopping to think about it. The fact that Gadamer’s theory fits an everyday example is a good sign of its descriptive power. It is also helpful that it describes the tentative development of questions, rather than offering a rigid system for producing answers.

One particular strength of *Wirkungsgeschichte* as an insight into the interpretative process lies in the way it combines the objective and the subjective. Gadamer attempts to move the discussion of hermeneutics beyond this binary division of objective/subjective; or, as it has sometimes become enmeshed in New Testament Studies, a competition between the claims of historical studies and literary ones. He attempts to do this, not in the conventional way by affirming the rightful claims of each perspective, but by showing that this binary division itself is a misconception about how the world is.⁴⁹

Gadamer’s understanding of tradition is essential to this. Tradition is indispensable to interpretation because it provides the vital pre-understanding which makes it possible to begin to make sense of a text. Tradition is what fills the domain within my horizon, therefore it is both ‘inside’ my inner world of perception and yet also genuinely ‘outside’ in the wider historical world of events, contingencies and culture where my perceptions have been shaped. These two worlds cannot

⁴⁹ See Gadamer, 1989:xxx (Gadamer, 1975:xix), “—the purpose of my investigation is...to show that understanding is never a subjective relation to a given ‘object’ but to the history of its effect.”

be separated from one another in reality, only in my imagination. I can no more make an interpretation that comes entirely out of my own head, than I can make one which comes entirely from the author's intentions in writing. It is not a question of which goal I am going to aim at—personal immediacy or historical distance—but rather that I need to understand both these aspects are actually in a relationship of co-dependence with one another. This new relationship exists within *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, historically effected consciousness.

The effects of a text are not mere external accretions to be sanded off by the use of a rigorous method. They are, rather, the framing of the text within a pattern which makes it readable or intelligible in any way at all. To try and read a text outside of the web of the history of effects is not a logical endeavour; it would be like trying to breathe in a vacuum. *Wirkungsgeschichte* in Gadamer's terms, then, is the web of 'effects' which surround a text and play a key part in its interpretation, whether one is aware of them or not.⁵⁰ Since the 'effects' cannot be simply removed wholesale, we have to enter into a more subtle negotiation with them; a process of comparison and analysis. Acknowledging that consciousness is always historically affected is not the cue to throw in the towel in the struggle for understanding; rather it is the cue for a celebration of the fact that working towards understanding is now seen to be possible.

The glimpse which Gadamer gives us into the process of understanding can be richly beneficial. If we can move from a picture of what *is*, i.e. that our interpretations are historically effected, to a picture of how we can better interpret texts making use of this knowledge, the benefits will be enormous.

Gadamer hints at the next step which might follow on from his philosophy in the following terms:

To bring about this fusion [of horizons] in a regulated way (den kontrollierten Vollzug) is the task of what we called historically effected consciousness.⁵¹ [*italics mine*]

The task facing those who would introduce the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* into New Testament Studies is to develop a procedure which will bring about the fusion of horizons 'in a regulated way.' The procedure adopted in this project could be seen as a practical expansion of

⁵⁰ See Gadamer, 1989:301 (Gadamer, 1975:285).

⁵¹ Gadamer, 1989:307 (Gadamer, 1975:290).

Gadamer's theory: instead of one fusion of horizons in the act of reading the biblical text, I seek many 'fusions' as I attempt to understand a selection of the pericope's many 'effects'. These secondary acts of interpretation potentially offer a number of new insights into the text and into my own relationship to the ongoing *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the passage. The challenge is to take what is 'feasible, possible and correct'⁵² within Gadamer's insights and bring it into dialogue with the more familiar methods of New Testament interpretation.

Wirkungsgeschichte lays stress on understanding as a combination of personal and historical factors. It endeavours to maintain the tension of historical distance and the importance of the text as an object in itself. At the same time, it stresses that an interpretation is always a personal realisation of the text; something achieved through connection and application, not impersonal method, which is, in any case, an illusion. It steers a course between the naiveté of historicism and the cynicism of subjectivism. What follows is an outline of the possible benefits of following this procedure.

THE BENEFITS OF EXAMINING THE *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE* OF AN NT TEXT

The first benefit is that it gives us an experience of actual historical distance. The two millennia which separate a modern reader from a New Testament text are no longer simply theoretical, but are experienced through the specific historical interpretations studied. It is surprising how quickly examining even a few historical realizations of a New Testament text begins to raise previously unthought of questions both about the texts and about one's own present day assumptions. Luz comments that the history of interpretation and the history of influence,

—tend to prevent us from making the text naively contemporary by passing over the centuries. By calling attention to the distinctiveness of each historical situation, including that of the interpreter, they unburden the present from premature biblical demands, the obverse of which in the history of interpretation every time has been the neutralization of the text by reinterpretation, internalization, etc.⁵³

We need to maintain the tension between the text and the present if fruitful interpretations are going to be achieved. This tension is

⁵² Uncovering this is Gadamer's description of his purpose in doing philosophy; see Gadamer, 1989:xxxviii (Gadamer, 1975:xxv).

⁵³ Luz, 1990b:97.

heightened as one examines different interpretations which have a different horizon in history from one's own.

Bockmuehl also comments on the deficiencies of interpretations which relate only to the first and twentieth centuries:

And yet, sadly, even those commentaries that are interested in how 'the Bible speaks today' usually assume at best that good hermeneutics is mainly a matter of 'fusing two horizons', the ancient and the modern: the two thousand years in between are of little or no interest.⁵⁴

Bockmuehl's use of the phrase 'fusing two horizons' here does not equate with Gadamer's own use of the term, as we have seen. The point still stands, however: a sense of historical distance based on a theoretical chasm⁵⁵ of two thousand years really has only a fragile grasp of historical difference. On the other hand, experiencing actual historical distance is achieved through comparing a number of specific texts and artefacts which have historical differences between them. It allows us, in Steiner's telling phrase, "to inhabit the tentative."⁵⁶

Another advantage to looking at the history of interpretation is the uncovering of our own roots. Luz describes this as a process of discovering who we are by seeing where we have come from through the development of our own tradition. The pre-history of one's own interpretation can open up a new sense of perspective and deepen understanding.⁵⁷ The other side of this coin is that we can extend ourselves by learning from other traditions.⁵⁸ This process of expanding one's own horizon is similar to that experienced when doing more conventional New Testament research, except that the net is cast more widely into sometimes alien non-academic waters; or the waters of another tradition or discipline. The friction of recognising different and alien assumptions in an interpretation can help an interpreter isolate and acknowledge the patterns of their own tradition.

Thirdly, both Luz and Bockmuehl assert that the history of influence helps the reader to connect with the biblical text. Luz explains this as introducing the text into the present;⁵⁹ Bockmuehl refers to making

⁵⁴ Bockmuehl, 1995:58.

⁵⁵ Cf. Gadamer, 1989:297 (Gadamer, 1975:281), temporal distance is, "—not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us."

⁵⁶ Steiner, 1989:176.

⁵⁷ Luz, 1990b:96–7. See also Bockmuehl, 1995:68.

⁵⁸ Luz, 1990b:97; Bockmuehl, 1995:68.

⁵⁹ Luz, 1990b:99.

a 'hermeneutical return trip' between the modern and the ancient worlds.⁶⁰ They are both concerned with the inability they perceive of traditional historical critical studies to allow the Bible to speak today. Luz suggests that an alienation between the reader and the text turns the text into a puzzle and a problem, rather than an opening for an encounter.⁶¹ Bockmuehl refers to much recent western academic critical study as 'rootless and ephemeral'.⁶² Mark Brett's description of the critic Richard Rorty's experience of reading literary criticism makes a similar point:

—Rorty reports his boredom at having to slog through an anthology of essays...none of which seemed to make any difference to the critic's self-understanding. What Rorty missed in this anthology was a reader who had been 'enraptured or destabilised by the text', a reader whose interpretative interests and purposes had actually been changed by the experience of reading.⁶³

Both Luz and Bockmuehl regard the examination of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a vital second step for connecting with a text's power and effect. Gadamer's critique of the elevation of the historicity of understanding seems apt here: he saw it as condemned to ask the question, "Is this historical?" while not being able to ask the question, "Is this true?"⁶⁴

Fourthly, examining the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text also brings together both scholarly and confessional works. If it is not possible for an interpretation to be simply objective and disinterested, then there is no need automatically to discount material developed with explicit devotion and commitment. In fact, it may be this very material which discloses more of the text through its particular connection with it. The discernment required for interpretation is not between academic rigour and soft-edged faith, but between an accurate perception of the text and presumptions about what it means. This sifting process will need to be applied to every type of interpretation. Since one cannot be detached, perhaps one should try to be attached in a number of different ways. As Coggins expresses it, a piece of music may supply something to the understanding of a text that an analysis of its sources lacks.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Bockmuehl, 1995:60.

⁶¹ Luz, 1994:32.

⁶² Bockmuehl, 1995:58.

⁶³ Brett, 1993:25.

⁶⁴ See Gadamer, 1989:303 (Gadamer, 1975:287).

⁶⁵ See Coggins, 1993:172.

Part of the change in my own thinking about the portrayal of Peter was brought about by looking at a Russian icon of Peter. The Peter of this icon stands with his back slightly curved, suggesting thoughtfulness rather than headstrong impetuosity. His hands and feet are small, and his hands are held in an open gesture. The keys of the kingdom look almost like a domestic house key. His eyes seem thoughtful and rather sad. Looking at this icon prompted me to question whether my own traditional picture of Peter was self-evidently true.

Fifthly, examining the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text can enhance the procedures of other critical approaches. The history of interpretation of a particular text often throws up historical questions which cannot be answered directly from the text. Why is it that passages in Matthew's gospel such as the one concerning oaths (Mt 5:33–37) or Jesus speaking to Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:18) have generated such weights of exegetical comment? An exploration of their *Wirkungsgeschichte* suggests that it is not because they are inherently grammatically difficult or obscure, but because they have been experienced as difficult in the light of the political, theological and ecclesiastical commitments of their readers.⁶⁶ Exegesis is not produced in an ideological vacuum. One cannot effectively consider the various interpretations of texts like these as if they were ahistorical, logical alternatives—like so many different solutions to a mathematical problem. Tracing the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text can prepare the way for a more nuanced response, both appreciative and critical of different realizations of the text in different periods.⁶⁷ Ebeling gives this warning about avoiding such issues because,

—the very history which we neglect takes its revenge upon us by binding us in its fetters.⁶⁸

Without some awareness of the history surrounding an interpretation, it becomes very hard to move beyond the original framework of questions within which it operates.⁶⁹

The insights of sociology have given a whole new dimension to exegesis by alerting us to ask questions about the social relationships

⁶⁶ See Luz, 1990b:318–322 where he considers the diverse interpretations given of Mt 5:33–37 by the Reformers, Quakers, Anabaptists, etc.

⁶⁷ See particularly Luz, 1996.

⁶⁸ Ebeling, 1968:11.

⁶⁹ See Thiselton, 1980:315, “Yet when we look at the history of biblical interpretation, we can see that too often a theological pre-understanding has brought about a premature and uncritical understanding of the text.” His examples are medieval and ecclesiastical, but one could include some modern academic interpretations.

and interactions depicted within the text. There is, however, a kind of functionalism in some social-scientific exegesis which can make it excessively reductionist. Some of the models and procedures used are designed to strip the surface meaning of the text down to its essential (and hidden) social functions. This can produce some clumsy results, written with an emphasis on decoding rather than understanding.⁷⁰

Tracing the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text would provide an opportunity for applying the same sociological insights in a more flexible manner. For instance, instead of asking whether the community Matthew depicts is more like a 'church' or a 'sect', relying solely on formal sociological definitions for guidance, one could examine realizations of the text in 'church' and 'sect' settings. The sociological analysis would then be of the interaction of known historical groups (from their texts, artefacts, architecture, archives, etc.) with the text.⁷¹ The question would be changed from, "What was the function of this text for its first readers?" to "How has this text actually been used and interpreted within different groups through history?" In other words, "How has it actually functioned?" The first question tends to reduce the meaning of the text to achieving certain set sociological purposes such as legitimation; the second question opens up the field of study to survey a number of sources of evidence. Instead of relying solely on a theoretical model, the interpreter could analyse the praxis of a number of actual groups who have interpreted the text. At the end of this process, a sociological survey of the use of the text could be given, highlighting how well or ill it fitted with the lifestyle of particular groups who interpreted it. This might offer new insights into whether the community depicted or implied within the text is more 'church-like' or 'sect-like', or whether a new category is required.

Literary approaches to New Testament criticism are often condemned for lacking a sense of historical distance, focussing instead on the present-day reader's immediate response to the text and the particular features of the narrative.⁷² Literary critics respond that at least they take seriously the particular nature of the text as a 'language event'⁷³

⁷⁰ E.g. see White, 1986:61–88—"Her [Douglas'] cultural graph permits us to decode otherwise obscure cues..."

⁷¹ This method could be akin to the technique of using sociological theory combined with a comparison of a near contemporary document outlined in Stanton, 1992:85–107.

⁷² E.g. Kingsbury, 1988a, 1992; Edwards, 1985, etc.

⁷³ See Ricoeur, 1991:89.

and as a work of art, rather than assuming that it is ‘a window on history’.⁷⁴ Could these competing agendas both find *Wirkungsgeschichte* useful? Examining the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a particular text promotes a sense of historical distance, as we have already seen; but it also does not preclude an examination of literary artistry. Froehlich, who approaches *Wirkungsgeschichte* from the perspective of church history, speaks of the “immense power of biblical language” to generate interpretations and responses.⁷⁵ Because the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a particular text involves an expansion of the field of study and not a contraction, it can perhaps accommodate both historical, sociological and literary approaches. It may also offer new ways of refining each of these methods through the comparative study of a text’s ‘history of effects’.

In summary, tracing the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text offers the following benefits: it promotes a sense of historical distance while encouraging the reader to connect with the text. It draws on both academic and explicitly confessional texts and artefacts thereby being open to the centuries of interpretation before there was a formal division between these two approaches. It encourages self-awareness through the study of one’s own and others’ traditions; in this way it helps to bring to light the other side of historical conditioning fundamental to interpretation—that of the reader.⁷⁶ Lastly, it is a procedure which offers the hope of compatibility with a number of different methods of interpretation which have often been held apart, to the detriment of New Testament Studies.⁷⁷

THE PROBLEMS IN EXAMINING THE *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE* OF A NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

When a procedure offers such potential, it naturally also offers hazards and pitfalls. The very comprehensiveness of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text gives rise to problems.

⁷⁴ See Petersen, 1978:19. The metaphor of the window comes from Murray Krieger.

⁷⁵ Froehlich, 1991:341. This is akin to Jauss’ use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* to alert him to the “—potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception.” Jauss, 1982:30.

⁷⁶ See Thiselton, 1980:11.

⁷⁷ See Stanton, 1992:108, “In my view, recognition of the value of all three methods [historical, literary and sociological] and of their mutual inter-dependence is crucial for scholarly discussion of the gospels. This is the way forward from the current disarray which has arisen in Matthean scholarship as the result of the use of diverse methods.”

The first problem is the sheer volume of material now considered relevant to the process of interpretation. Bockmuehl speaks of building a road back to the text by following the route of the work already done by others.⁷⁸ As he points out, however, it is unlikely that the whole route can be traced sequentially in detail, partly because vast quantities of 'effects' will be inaccessible to the interpreter, like the proverbial nine-tenths of an iceberg.⁷⁹ Writings such as jokes and song lyrics are not always systematically catalogued or even preserved, for instance, but may have had a considerable influence on the popular understanding of a particular text in their time. Other 'effects', such as paintings and sculpture, may be catalogued according to the criteria of a different discipline, and so be hard to access. 'Effects' produced by the socially marginalised people of different historical periods (e.g. women, slaves, heretics, certain racial groups) will not be generally available as published resources. It is also true that the inter-relationship of 'effects' will not necessarily be clear. The 'effects' of a text fill and delineate the space between the text and the interpreter within his or her horizon, and so more resemble ripples on a pond than a road through a landscape.⁸⁰ Within *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* (historically effected consciousness), there can be no clearly drawn linear 'time line' between the reader and the text, but rather a series of shifting perceptions and connections.

The vast range of material under examination could open the critic to two charges of being 'dilettante':⁸¹ firstly, because she or he is blundering into so many other disciplines (church history, history of art, history of religions, systematic theology, philosophy, social history, literature, music, etc.) without their specific skills; secondly, because she or he is plundering small fragments of discourse which seem of relevance to the text being examined, yet at the same time discarding the wider context in which these fragments originate. Rather than producing deep understanding and a careful interpretation, such an exercise could be a historical 'pick and mix' collage of ideas, signifying

⁷⁸ Bockmuehl, 1995:60.

⁷⁹ Bockmuehl, 1995:66.

⁸⁰ Cf. Steiner, 1989:82–83, "As the ripples and shot-silk interference effects expand outwards, they become of incommensurable inclusiveness and complexity... There is a palpable sense in which one can see that the total explicative context, the total horizon of relevant values which surround the meaning of the meaning of any verbal or written utterance is that of the universe as human beings, who are beings of speech, inhabit it."

⁸¹ See Luz, 1996:273.

whatever the interpreter chooses. Clearly some priorities must be set so that the gathering of material can be suitably focussed and detailed. However, setting such priorities creates its own problems.

How is one going to value the different 'effects' relative to each other?⁸² Luz has four positive criteria for giving an 'effect' particular attention: he puts more weight on 'effects' which illuminate the critic's own pre-understanding, or have had a significant impact on Protestant or Catholic confessions, or were realised in a setting in time and culture much closer to the text than the present day and which provide a corrective to modern understandings, or were particularly early interpretations whose effects have been longlasting.⁸³ These criteria are pragmatic: they are designed to preselect the 'effects' which will be most likely to be fruitful for a present day interpreter. They are also designed to highlight interpretative assumptions which could pass unquestioned in a more traditional historical approach.

Räisänen adds a negative criterion to this list: the need to distinguish the genuine 'effect' of a text from the mere 'use' of a text. As Bockmuehl points out, making such a distinction is difficult:⁸⁴ is an interpretation an 'effect' if I find it agreeable and interesting, but a 'use' or 'abuse' if I do not? Would this criterion simply become a refined way of calling an interpretation 'heretical'? And yet there is a real issue here. Bockmuehl suggests a more precise test: he excludes from his compilation of 'effects' the times a text is cited simply as proof of a matter which has already been established by other means.⁸⁵ This is a much clearer criterion than Räisänen's, although it is perhaps more applicable to samples of theological writing than it is to artefacts.

My own criteria for selecting 'effects' are considerably more inclusive. To pre-judge whether an 'effect' is significant or not is to slip back into categories used in the history of interpretation, ignoring the inclusivity which marks out *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a different approach. Given that it is impossible to uncover all the 'effects' through the centuries of even a single Gospel pericope, I have chosen to look at clusters of 'effects', either within a particular historical period or produced in a particular medium. The advantage of examining a cluster of 'effects' is that it is possible to develop a deeper appreciation of its context. Within a

⁸² See discussion in Räisänen, 1992:306–13.

⁸³ See Luz, 1990b:96.

⁸⁴ See Bockmuehl, 1995:63.

⁸⁵ See Bockmuehl, 1995:63.

cluster, 'effects' are considered on the basis of how detailed or striking they are, rather than on the contribution they have made to confessional or scholarly history. In any case, the story of walking on the water is generally marginal to discussions of doctrine or praxis and so does not yield historic 'effects' of this sort.⁸⁶

Once a selection of effects has been made and examined, the question of meaning arises. Does the text have many meanings, according to the many ways in which it has been understood? Or does it have one essential meaning which is understood a bit more or a bit less by interpreters in different situations? Both Luz and Bockmuehl seem to accept that the meaning uncovered by historical research is a type of gold standard. Bockmuehl speaks of "the original intent"⁸⁷ and the importance of "vital historical-critical work";⁸⁸ Luz mentions a text's "original sense"⁸⁹ or "kernel meaning".⁹⁰ Both are anxious that this meaning should be re-applied in different settings,⁹¹ but they are sure that it exists, and is to a large extent recoverable in its first century form. Kovacs and Rowland imply that there are two types of meaning: what the Bible "originally meant," and "what people believe the Bible means."⁹² Luz goes on to consider the further question of what weight should be given to 'effects' which are fruitful, but historically inaccurate:

The question is, therefore: is it theologically permissible to interpret a text against its original sense, if the sense which emerges is centrally gospel for today's recipients and at the same time helpful to them in their own situation?⁹³

His answer to this question is a qualified "yes", which fits with his essentially Augustinian⁹⁴ understanding of assigning value to interpretations: an interpretation is valuable if it increases love and accords with the fundamental history of Jesus.⁹⁵ He goes on,

⁸⁶ A discussion of a passage such as Peter's confession in Mt 16:15–19 would probably require an examination of lasting scholarly and confessional 'effects', however, because these have been so influential in its interpretation.

⁸⁷ Bockmuehl, 1995:62.

⁸⁸ Bockmuehl, 1995:87.

⁸⁹ Luz, 1996:309.

⁹⁰ Luz, 1994:22.

⁹¹ E.g. Bockmuehl, 1995:58, 87; Luz, 1990b:99, 1994:20.

⁹² See Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:xiii.

⁹³ Luz, 1996:309.

⁹⁴ See Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 3:10:5.

⁹⁵ See Luz, 1994:73, 94.

For me, the two criteria are expressions of the one Lord Jesus Christ. I understand my two criteria as a modern version of the classic unity of the human and divine natures of Jesus. I understand them in analogy to the incarnation, which binds God to human history and points to the nonimposing, violable character of God's majesty. For me the two criteria are two sides of one sole christological criterion of truth.⁹⁶

This is certainly a departure from the nineteenth and twentieth century historical criteria for judging an interpretation; they were focussed on striving for objectivity rather than love and in disclosing the earlier stages of tradition, rather than considering its onward development. It also shows that studying the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text highlights these issues of comparative value. The need to articulate the values on which the critic's own interpretation is to proceed is made urgent by the sheer variety of material examined. The study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a passage cannot, in and of itself, solve the fundamental question for all interpreters, "What constitutes a good reading?" In many ways, it simply makes the question more urgent. This question will have to be answered by criteria external to the history of 'effects'.⁹⁷ In theory, these could be limited to the traditional criteria of an already established method, but in practice the examination of a range of 'effects', particularly those from beyond the academy which have caused social discrimination or personal suffering, has prompted interpreters to employ theological, pastoral and ethical criteria in their judgments.⁹⁸ The realization that the interpretation of Scripture, far from being a merely academic pursuit, can make a profound difference to someone's social conditions or even make the difference between life and death, is a sobering one.

However for anyone concerned to produce a close reading of a biblical passage, it is necessary to turn back from the contemplation of the 'effects' to make a return journey to a *Wirkungsgeschichte*-enriched

⁹⁶ Luz, 1994:97.

⁹⁷ See the criticism of *Wirkungsgeschichte* offered by the Biblical Commission's document, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," fitzmyer, 1995:81, "—history also illustrates the prevalence from time to time of interpretations that are tendentious and false, baneful in their effect. . . This serves to show that this approach cannot constitute a discipline that would be purely autonomous. Discernment is required."

⁹⁸ See Luz, 1994:73, 94 as above. The Augustinian roots of this approach could be described as both theological and pastoral. See also Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:248–249 where they commend the life and teaching of Jesus as expressed in the Gospels as evaluative criteria. See also the work of Kenneth Newport on the Waco disaster, Newport, 2006.

exegesis. Very little work has yet been done on making explicit what this return journey, integrating the ‘history of effects’ and exegesis, involves. Without this return journey, the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text is simply an extra bolt-on procedure for exegetes: an interesting excursion, but no real help in reaching their destination.

What is this destination, and what needs to be done in order to reach it? An interpretation can be seen as a combination of two tasks, one involving definition and the other contextualization. The defining task involves delineating the range of possible meanings in a text, giving analytical reasons for ruling some meanings out and commending others as more accurate. The contextualizing task involves making sense of a text by connecting it with contemporary philosophical and theological tradition and culture.

The philosophical insights of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* suggest that these two tasks cannot be completed separately, but will become a single reflexive process; the task of definition involving the projection of a horizon and the task of contextualization amounting to a fusion of horizons. While these two tasks are part of any interpretation achieved through any method, the advantages of an interpretation aided by the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text are as follows: the task of the definition of possible meanings is potentially enriched by the consideration of more alternatives, and the task of contextualization is clarified by the study of other contextualizations in other cultural climates. Interpreters with a similar approach sometimes provide additional insights, interpreters with an entirely different approach challenge our own pre-understandings and so bring them out into the open. Sometimes hidden assumptions about how the task of definition should proceed are brought to light. This suggests that *Wirkungsgeschichte*-enriched exegesis will involve a careful process of analysis and reflection and will not be simply the compilation and cataloging of ‘effects’.⁹⁹ It also suggests that the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text should not be viewed as a replacement for other methods of interpretation, but rather as an additional tool.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Mark Edwards’ commentary on John, while being full of interesting references to ‘effects’ of the text, particularly in twentieth century poetry, suffers from a dearth of analytical comment and interpretative decisions. He describes it as, “—a mosaic of opinions,” Edwards, 2004:14. It does not so much offer *Wirkungsgeschichte*-enriched exegesis, as a catalogue of resources with which to begin such work.

¹⁰⁰ My notion that *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not, by definition, a method in its own right, is a contentious one. The new Blackwell Bible Commentaries series is based on the

The study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text carries another pitfall: the disillusion of the far-sighted. To look at so many interpretations and realizations of a text with the benefit of historical hindsight could heighten one's sense of the ways in which every interpretation is flawed, limited and partial. This could lead to an abandonment of the actual desire to interpret in favour of the desire simply to criticize other interpretations. The critic might focus on explaining away every interpretation, fuelled by a kind of nihilistic scepticism, exposing the hidden historical script of power and gain supposedly underlying them all. On the other hand, such a perspective could lead to an attitude of inclusive indifference: since every interpretation is contextual, the text means 'this' to me and 'that' to you, and the enquiry into meaning can proceed no further.

In summary, tracing the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text offers the following hazards: it could lead to methodological blunders when working in unfamiliar disciplines; it could also involve plundering other discourses for fragments relevant to the text without paying sufficient attention to their original context. Another hazard involves the criteria for the selection of 'effects' to be studied and the relative values granted to different interpretations. A standpoint of interpretative cynicism is also a distinct hazard, leading the critic to either deconstruct or simply accept every interpretation, with its consequent stalemate for the deepening of understanding.

supposition that, "—how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant," Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:xi. This implies that the 'effects' are not part of trying to find out what the text 'originally meant' but a research project in themselves. One of the aims of the commentary on Revelation (Kovacs and Rowland, 2004) is to commend poetic and imaginative appropriations of the text: "If we view exegesis as the close reading of the text, then this cannot be counted as exegesis. But the question is whether the Apocalypse is a text to be interpreted and deciphered or a text to be used and actualized." Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:12. This raises deeper questions about the best way to interpret Scripture generally: if the Bible is a series of texts "to be used and actualized", then perhaps traditional methods of exegesis are a generally inappropriate means of interpretation. It would be possible to use the ideas of *Wirkungsgeschichte* to devise a new theological (and perhaps sociological and anthropological) method of interpretation, shifting the field of study from the text itself to the ways it has been actualized. This would indeed be a new method. My aim in this project is much narrower: I want to produce a close reading of the text which is both enhanced and corrected by a study of some 'effects'. To do this effectively, I need the tools and insights of traditional methods. *Wirkungsgeschichte* does not provide any tools for the close reading of a text. In this sense, it is not an independent method within New Testament Studies.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter so far, *Wirkungsgeschichte* has been examined both as a philosophical concept and as a scholarly procedure. Some thoughts have been offered on its advantages and disadvantages as a procedure for studying New Testament texts. Can these elements be brought together in a practical way for the use of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in New Testament Studies?

Wirkungsgeschichte offers a way of understanding the whole process of interpretation and it offers a specific procedure i.e. the gathering and comparison of 'effects', but it offers nothing at the interim stage between these two—at the level that one might call 'method' or 'approach'. *Wirkungsgeschichte* does not offer guidance on the range of questions with which to approach the text. It does not offer an opinion on whether one should give priority to historical issues or literary ones, for instance. In other words, there is nothing in the philosophy nor the procedure which weds it to a particular critical approach.

In a world of competing methods, it is refreshing to find a philosophy and a procedure which can connect fruitfully with a number of them. On pages 17–19, I have tried to indicate how *Wirkungsgeschichte* could enhance different types of interpretation. The philosophy and the procedure can be brought to practical use, then, with the help of the focus and aims of a particular exegetical method; or even with a succession of different methods.

The starting point for this project is two traditional critical examinations: Chapter Two is a historical critical examination and Chapter Three a literary critical investigation. These discussions yield some results helpful in making an interpretation of Mt 14:22–33. They also raise a number of unanswered questions, both about the passage itself and about the conventional critical approaches used by present-day New Testament scholars in its interpretation. Chapters Four and five analyse two particular clusters of 'effects': Chapter Four discusses how the story is understood in some nineteenth-century theological texts and Chapter Five reflects on six works of art. The 'effects' have been examined in these two clusters to avoid the superficial approach which would arise if 'effects' were gathered randomly from throughout the reception history of the passage. These selections make it possible to study the 'effects' chosen in sufficient detail to avoid insensitive or surface readings. Neither Chapter Four or Chapter five is an exhaustive compilation of 'effects', even within the descriptive parameters of each

cluster, but each is comprehensive enough to be representative of their genre or medium. The aim, after all, is to enable *Wirkungsgeschichte*-enriched exegesis, not simply to produce a scrapbook of 'effects'. The selection needs to be wide enough to reflect accurately the impact of the pericope and to provide fresh perspectives, yet narrow enough to allow detailed discussion and critical reflection. The 'effects' discussed in these chapters offer additional resources for interpreting the passage and a way of reflecting critically on the issues raised in Chapters Two and Three.

Wirkungsgeschichte directs us towards what might be termed 'the hermeneutics of participation'. The philosophy of *Wirkungsgeschichte* makes it clear that every reader participates in history and can only interpret a text by virtue of that participation. The interpreter cannot stand outside historical consciousness, but only plunge more deeply into it, widening his or her horizons by further investigation, projecting or separating a second horizon and then experiencing the fusion of horizons.

A new aspect of *Wirkungsgeschichte* emerges from using Gadamer's philosophy to create a practical procedure. The technique of studying an 'effect' of a text puts the interpreter in a new position. The interpreter is now not only a reader, but also the observer of an act of reading. This sense of being a third party, standing to one side of the text and the reader, helps the interpreter to catch a glimpse of the text in action: an 'effect' in the making. Such a glimpse both instructs and inspires; it holds out the possibility of both distance and immediacy. Such is the contribution *Wirkungsgeschichte* can make to the interpretation of the New Testament.

CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORICAL CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF MT 14:22–33

Historical critical work is the foundation of modern biblical criticism. It emerged in the late eighteenth century when scholars began to apply to biblical texts the kind of critical questions used in the study of other historical texts.¹ Historical critical investigation stimulated the development of a range of specific methods: textual, source, form and later redaction criticism. Of course, asking some historical questions about biblical narratives goes back to the patristic period at least,² but never before had there been a thorough-going historical critical *method* which aimed at an objective and historically-based interpretation.

The history explored by this method lies behind the text.³ In the study of the gospels this leads to two levels of historical questioning: the sources for a particular passage (other gospels, proto-gospels, oral sources, etc.) and the events or influences which gave rise to the sources (an historical event, a saying transformed into a narrative, the particular needs of the Early Church, or the aims of the Evangelist and so on). Such interpretations aim to get beneath the narrative surface of the text to uncover the hidden inconsistencies and patterns: the awkward joins between one source and another, for instance, or the contemporary theological and cultural pressures which may have distorted the gospel account of a particular event.

By its very nature, this method could be described as invasive surgery:⁴ the critic cuts through familiar and reverential readings of a passage in order to bring to light the crucial history which lies beneath. To pursue this task, a critic has to adopt a stance which is both sceptical and

¹ E.g. the work of Michaelis (1717–91); Schleiermacher (1768–1834); Strauss (1808–74), etc. See discussion in Neill and Wright, 1988:1–34.

² E.g. Dionysius of Alexandria on the authorship of Revelation, see Dionysius, *From the Two Books on the Promises*, section 5.

³ As opposed to present-day literary examinations, which could be described as concerned with the ‘world of the text’ or as text-immanent.

⁴ ‘Surgery’ is actually a more positive image than some critics have used: Bornkamm speaks of certain searches for the historical Jesus as being like multiple amputations leaving a limbless torso, see Bornkamm, 1960:15. Houlden has described historical-critical studies as resembling an anatomist’s work at the dissecting table. See Houlden, 1986.

confident: sceptical of all interpretations which do not hold historical examination as of primary importance and yet confident that some fragments of history can be reliably uncovered from behind the text. Both this scepticism and this confidence owe a lot to the enlightenment frame of reference which dominated western thought at the time that the method was developed.⁵

The historical sources for early Christianity are nearly all texts. This means that the tools of historical critical interpretation are literary critical ones, in the sense that they are techniques such as comparisons of vocabulary and style. The observations which arise from this close reading of a text are then used to draw historical conclusions. Possible historical scenarios are created to account for the literary evidence, such as the author's use of diverse sources or the issues faced by a particular first century Christian community.⁶ There is an essential unreliability about drawing historical conclusions solely on the basis of literary critical observations, yet this problem is not often acknowledged.⁷ However, if these historical questions are going to be explored, there is no alternative to a close reading of the literary sources. Historians of early Christianity have a wealth of accounts of different events and sayings to examine, but these accounts mostly describe private conversations and small-scale incidents. At such a distance in time, the historical accuracy of most of these accounts can not be corroborated by archaeological evidence

⁵ Scepticism about the value of tradition as a source of reliable knowledge perhaps stemmed from Descartes' 'rational doubt' (see Grondin, 2003:26, where he speaks of "—the Cartesian concept of a new method that would make a *tabula rasa* of the ill-founded truths of tradition and common sense,") and confidence in the power of rational enquiry and the 'scientific method' perhaps gained particular influence as a result of the work of Newton and others. Note Hume's enthusiastic endorsement of experimental evidence in religion (*Hume, An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, part II, para 101).

⁶ Bauckham has challenged this approach, see Bauckham, 1998:9–48.

⁷ An example of an unqualified historical conclusion based on literary evidence is Dibelius' assertion that we can conclude 'with every certainty' that there were 'tellers of tales' because of the existence of tales within the Gospel tradition. Dibelius, 1971:70. Also see Bornkamm's assessment of the parable of the Great Supper, where he confidently asserts that Luke's version is earlier than Matthew's, and that certain features of Luke's version can be shown to be Luke's addition to the tradition. "There can be no doubt that..." Bornkamm, 1960:18. An exception is Fitzmyer's comment on the synoptic problem, "Extrinsic, historically trustworthy data about the composition of these Gospels are totally lacking, and the complexity of the traditions embedded within them, the evangelists' editorial redaction of them, and their free composition bedevil all attempts to analyze objectively the intrinsic data with critical literary methods." Fitzmyer, 1986:63.

or independent non-Christian sources. Yet the historical basis of such a small event as a report that Jesus walked on the water one night is tantalisingly significant to Christians. Historians of early Christianity duly try to assess the historical reliability of such accounts despite the minute amount of evidence available for examination.⁸

Historical questions are highly relevant to Christian truth claims, as Christianity is a faith which is rooted in accounts of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Dominic Crossan expresses his desire for historical clarity in these terms:

—if you say for example, ‘Jesus walked on the water,’ then I want to know, is that an historical statement reconstructed by historians or is that a statement of the power of Jesus, say, within the Church, to save the disciples and the Church from floundering in the waters? I want to know what that is because if we’re making an historical statement, we have to say it is that. If it’s a symbolic religious statement we have to say that. We have, I think, let those slide into one another too often.⁹

While the point is well made, the division is perhaps drawn too harshly. Most present day critics would accept that many New Testament pericopae carry a rich symbolic potential regardless of whether or not they have an historical core. In other words, they can offer both symbolic meaning and historical information. For many scholars, historical critical examination has become an examination of sources, influences and redaction rather than a process of historical reconstruction: they concentrate on the history of the text rather than the history of Jesus of Nazareth. This first level of historical questioning has its own value in illuminating the possible meaning of the text for its first readers; but the deeper, second level of historical questioning, which involves discerning the possible detail of actual events, has regained prominence through the revival of interest in the quest for the historical Jesus.¹⁰ This means that there are a number of works which discuss Mt 14:22–33 in the context of a larger discussion of the historical core of the Jesus

⁸ Dodd does comment, “—the historical problem in the gospels is one of peculiar difficulty,” Dodd, 1963:2. Historical assessment is on firmer ground when it involves examining more general questions such as whether or not accounts of miracles were present in the earliest strata of Christian tradition, see Meier, 1994:630–31; or whether Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God, see Theissen, 1996:169.

⁹ An excerpt from the transcript of ‘The Conversation Continues’ taken from <<http://www.ntgateway.com/xtalk/conversation.html>>.

¹⁰ E.g. see Meier, 1991; 1994.

tradition, and also some which concentrate more narrowly on the cultural heritage which influenced Matthew's text.

This historical critical examination begins at the level of the history of the text. The first section is a discussion of key textual variants and unusual vocabulary in an attempt to clarify the meaning of the earliest form of the text. It should not be forgotten that editions of the Greek text such as Nestle-Aland are virtual texts; they are compilations of judicious decisions on textual variants, a synthesis of a complex manuscript history rather than a single copy of an actual text. A historical examination therefore needs to begin with a consideration of the manuscript history and the clearest possible philological information about the vocabulary. Without this, further judgments about the nuanced meaning of the text will be built on shifting sand.

The second section is a consideration of the relationship between the parallel accounts in Mark, Matthew and John. The discovery of the interdependence of the Synoptic Gospels offered a significant insight into how they were composed. It contributed to the form critical understanding that the deeper structure of a Gospel is made up of separate units of tradition.¹¹ The preservation and adaptation of these units thus became a demonstrable factor in the process of Gospel composition, identifiable within synoptic dependence and probable within the structures of John's Gospel. This has implications for the study of Mt 14:22–33: a historical critical examination of this passage can not look simply at the place of this story within Matthew, but must look between Gospels, describing the relationship between Matthew's account and the parallels in Mark and John. There is a close literary relationship between the Markan and Matthean accounts which needs elucidation. There are both significant similarities and differences between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts which might suggest some characteristics of the earlier pre-Gospel strata of tradition.

The third section is a discussion of possible sources for this pericope. There are several literary sources independent of the Gospels

¹¹ The pursuit of these original 'forms' did bypass the focus on sources, however, as the essential forms were presumed to have remained constant from the time that the tradition was fixed, regardless of the particular sources they passed through. But the dependency on earlier source criticism can be seen when Bultmann suggests that observing the way that Matthew and Luke use Mark may show a consistent 'law' in the use of sources which can then be used to infer the nature of the tradition before Markan editing. This helps in the more precise identification of form. See Bultmann, 1968:6.

which might have inspired this story: Old Testament poetic references to YHWH and the sea, Buddhist accounts of walking on the water and hellenistic narratives of sea-walking. All of these possible sources are potentially significant for an adequate historical critical interpretation.

The fourth section discusses a particular cultural issue, the cult of the 'divine man', to try and determine whether it had any significant influence on the shaping of Matthew's pericope.

The fifth section moves to the deeper, second level of historical investigation with a reflection on the quest for the historical Jesus as it effects the interpretation of Mt 14:22–33. This includes a critical discussion of the general adequacy of the criteria used to arrive at such judgments. The chapter concludes with a summary of results and of the issues raised which require further consideration.

TEXTUAL VARIANTS AND VOCABULARY

Verse 22

Καὶ εὐθέως ἠνάγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγειν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πέραν, ἕως οὗ ἀπολύσῃ τοὺς ὄχλους.

Textual variations

εὐθέως is probably original to the text, even though it is omitted from some versions, e.g. the uncials **S**, **C**, and 892, and in sys,c. On balance, it seems more likely that it has been accidentally omitted from these witnesses than that the other witnesses have included the word as a scribal accommodation to the Markan text. The uncials have all been corrected to include εὐθέως although it was originally absent. It is questionable whether the Syriac versions are enough to overturn the majority reading.¹² Καὶ εὐθέως is an unusual connecting phrase for a story in Matthew; it is more typically Markan. In Mt 15:39, for instance, Matthew does not have the corresponding phrase Καὶ εὐθύς, which occurs in Mark 8:10. Καὶ εὐθέως represents a stylistic departure which may relate to the structure of this pericope as a whole: there are echoes in verse 27, εὐθύς and verse 31, εὐθέως. These verses may

¹² See Metzger, 1971:36.

convey the immediacy of Jesus' actions and words in this story or act as markers of the passage's chiasmic structure.¹³

Vocabulary

An unusual feature of this verse is the word ἡνάγκασεν, the aorist of ἀναγκάζω, to compel, or to strongly urge or invite.¹⁴ It is combined with ἐμβῆναι, the 2nd aorist infinitive of ἐμβάινω, to embark, and so is translated in the NRSV as 'he made the disciples get into the boat'. Matthew has preserved these verbs from his Markan source.¹⁵ Davies and Allison take the line that the verb has a weakened sense in this context, meaning to 'urge' or 'invite'.¹⁶ The only use of this verb in a different pericope in the Synoptics is in Luke 14:23, ('Go out into the roads and lanes and *compel* people to come in,' NRSV) which has come to have chilling associations through its later use by Augustine. France comments that it is an unusually forceful word in the context of Mt 14:22.¹⁷ Whether or not the word has a forceful or a weakened sense, it does establish that the initiative for the disciples setting off by boat belongs to Jesus.

Some commentators, reflecting on this urgent insistence, and reading this passage alongside John 6:14–15, have concluded that Jesus urges his disciples to leave because he wants to prevent the crowds (and the disciples?) from making him King.¹⁸ Others have suggested that Jesus sends them away because he is eager to perform this miracle of walking on the water as part of his proclamation of the Kingdom.¹⁹ Still others have seen the whole story as an exercise in strengthening the disciples' faith which necessarily had to begin with this separation of

¹³ See the discussion on possible chiasms, etc. in Chapter Three, p. 88.

¹⁴ See BDAG, 3rd edition.

¹⁵ See discussion of the relationship between the Matthean, Markan and Johannine versions of this story, pp. 42–47.

¹⁶ Davies and Allison, 1991:501.

¹⁷ See France, 1985:238.

¹⁸ E.g. see Gundry, 1982:296; France, 1985:238; Lagrange, 1948:293 refers to "une excitation messianique". There is a flaw in this argument, however: John is the only Evangelist to mention this disturbance, yet he is also the only one not to use this verb of compulsion (John 6:15–16). If none of the three writers of this story bring these two ideas together, perhaps it is presumptuous for us to do so.

¹⁹ E.g. see Heil, 1981:31. The suggestion that Jesus has foreknowledge of the weather and would engineer an opportunity to perform a miracle has far-reaching christological implications.

master and disciples.²⁰ There is another possibility: Mt 14:13 states that Jesus' reaction to hearing about John the Baptist's martyrdom was to withdraw to a deserted place by himself, (κατ' ἰδίαν). This withdrawal is interrupted by the arrival of the crowds. Jesus has compassion for them and the feeding of the five thousand follows. The sending ahead of the disciples and the dismissing of the crowds in verse 22 can be seen simply as Jesus returning to his original plan of action as described in verse 13. As if to underline this, the phrase κατ' ἰδίαν is repeated in verse 23.

Verse 24

τὸ δὲ πλοῖον ἤδη σταδίους πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀπεῖχεν βασανιζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων, ἦν γὰρ ἐναντίος ὁ ἄνεμος.

Textual variations

There is a significant variation between σταδίους πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀπεῖχεν and the alternative phrase, μέσον τῆς θαλάσσης.²¹ Metzger²² favours the σταδίους πολλοὺς reading, as he feels that the development of the μέσον τῆς θαλάσσης reading can best be explained as an assimilation to Mark whereas the σταδίους πολλοὺς reading cannot be so easily explained. Lagrange asserts that σταδίους πολλοὺς arose as an accommodation to John 6:19.²³ This has little merit, however, since the Johannine phrase is significantly different: σταδίους εἴκοσι πέντε ἢ τριάκοντα. Luz favours σταδίους πολλοὺς, and comments that it is interesting that Matthew is closer to John than to Mark at this point.²⁴ This is far too small a peg on which to hang a source-critical speculation, but it is interesting to consider whether Matthew might have had access to a pre-Gospel version of the story as well as to Mark. On balance, the σταδίους πολλοὺς version seems likely to be the earlier reading, since it is difficult to account for its later emergence.

²⁰ E.g. see Chrysostom, *Homily I*; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, Book XI, chapters 5+6. This is more of a meditative guess about the deeper significance of this narrative, rather than a comment based on the actual wording of the text.

²¹ Note there is also a variation on σταδίους πολλοὺς—σταδίους ἰκάνους—but this only in Q, (700) and sy^{c-p}. μέσον τῆς θαλάσσης (with slight variations) has considerable support, including a number of uncials and f¹. See Nestlé-Aland, 27th Edition.

²² See Metzger, 1971:37.

²³ See Lagrange, 1927:293–4.

²⁴ See Luz, 1990a:405.

Vocabulary

βασανιζόμενον, the passive participle of βασανίζω, is defined by Danker as ‘to torture, torment or harass’.²⁵ The same verb is used concerning paralysis in Mt 8:6, and of tormented demons in Mt 8:29. It is a strong verb and may carry with it some sense of the sea as the locus of chaos and evil. Matthew does not follow Mark here, who describes the disciples as straining at the oars (Mk. 6:48). Matthew’s focus on the boat rather than the disciples may give some justification for concluding that it has a symbolic role within this pericope, perhaps as a picture of the church, as Tertullian suggests.²⁶ On the other hand, many of the significant actions in this story take place outside the boat, so that assigning a symbolic meaning is not straightforward.²⁷

Verse 27

εὐθὺς δὲ ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς αὐτοῖς λέγων· θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε.

Textual variations

Nestle-Aland indicate that there is uncertainty about part of this verse by placing ὁ Ἰησοῦς in square brackets. Sibinga outlines the three possible readings for the phrase in which it occurs:

ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς	8*, D, 084 ^{vid} , <i>pc</i> .
ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς αὐτοῖς	8 ^a , B, 1365, <i>pc</i> .
ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς	C, K, L, P.

He puts forward a convincing argument for accepting the second reading as original, because it is the most unusual.²⁸ The first could be explained as an omission and the third as a clarification, but it is hard to explain why, if it was not there already, a scribe would insert ὁ Ἰησοῦς into the middle of this phrase as in the second reading. This

²⁵ See BDAG, 3rd Edition.

²⁶ See Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chapter XII.

²⁷ See Schweizer, 1976:210, “Auch hier sieht Matthäus also wahrscheinlich das Schiff als Bild für die Gemeinde.” vs. Luz, 1990a:409, “Matthäus appliziert die Seewandelgeschichte nicht ekklesiologisch, sondern auf den einzelnen Christen.”

²⁸ See Sibinga, 1981:24–25.

does still leave the question of why *Matthew* would use this word order.²⁹ Perhaps the unusual word order emphasizes that these are significant words of Jesus.

Vocabulary

The implications of ἐγὼ εἰμι are particularly important: is this simply an emphatic “It’s me!” or is it a pronouncement of divine majesty echoing “I AM”? This phrase cannot be explored theologically without careful attention to the narrative in which it occurs. Jesus begins by saying, *θαρσεῖτε*—‘Take heart,’ so it is reasonable to suppose that what follows, ἐγὼ εἰμι, is meant to be equally reassuring. A divine pronouncement hardly seems to fit the context. This motivation to reassure suggests that he is saying, “It’s me, Jesus, and not a φάντασμά for you (the disciples) to be afraid of.” This point is underlined in Matthew’s account, as the fearful cry of the disciples, φάντασμά ἐστίν, has been given in direct speech; ἐγὼ εἰμι is a direct refutation of this.

However, for the disciples, the implications are more complex. They are, presumably, reassured by the fact that the figure walking towards them on the sea is Jesus and not a φάντασμά, but the fact that Jesus can walk on the water presents them with a previously unknown aspect of his identity. The familiar voice and the unfamiliar action combine; it is Jesus, but not the Jesus they thought they knew. As Gundry puts it, these words of Jesus are likely to have deep significance because Jesus is walking on the water as he speaks and because these words point towards the disciples’ confession at the end of the story (verse 33).³⁰ It would be too restrictive an interpretation, then, to take the words of Jesus ἐγὼ εἰμι solely as a mundane self-identification. For the readers or hearers of this story, surely there is also an unavoidable link between the vocabulary the Septuagint uses of God and the words Jesus uses of himself.³¹

²⁹ Sibinga, 1981:26. A possible answer to this may lie in the chiasmic structure of the passage as a whole—see Sibinga’s theories on the importance of the midpoint of the story counted in syllables—Sibinga, 1981:29, 32–33. On his reckoning, if the word order was conventional in this verse then the midpoint would fall clumsily between ὁ and Ἰησοῦς; instead it comes between ὁ Ἰησοῦς and αὐτοῖς. But would Matthew really count syllables as if he were composing a haiku or a sonnet rather than writing prose? If the Gospel was originally written to be read aloud, manipulating the word order to this extent seems particularly unlikely.

³⁰ See Gundry, 1982:299.

³¹ See e.g. LXX Isaiah 41:4, 43:10, 47:8, 10. See also the discussion in Davies and Allison, 1991:506.

Luz suggests a multi-layered approach:

ἐγὼ εἰμι hat kein Prädikativ: Jesus sagt nicht, daß er dieser oder jener sei, sondern einfach: «Ich bin es». Das ist vordergründig ein einfacher Verweis des Sprechers auf sich selbst: Jesus «entdämonisiert» also das Gespenst, indem er auf sich selbst hinweist, den die Jünger ja kennen. Hintergründig aber erinnert sein «ich bin es» an die Selbstvorstellung Jahwes in der Bibel.³²

It is fruitless to dispute whether or not the isolated phrase ἐγὼ εἰμι is a reference to the Old Testament phrase אֲנִי-יְהוָה.³³ The words of Jesus in this story can only be understood in the context of the actions which prompted them. In this terrifying setting, they are reassuringly ordinary, but, at the same time, this means that they are astonishing in their implications: the flesh and blood Jesus is not only demonstrating power over nature, but some extraordinary and mysterious relationship with it.

Verse 28

ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν: κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ, κέλευσόν με ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σε ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα.

Vocabulary

The use of the vocative κύριε here is mirrored in verse 30, when Peter cries out to Jesus for help. Commentators disagree on the weight which should be given to this title. Davies and Allison, for instance, suggest that this “—title seemingly reflects an awareness that Jesus shares in the sovereign lordship of Yahweh.”³⁴ Others, such as Kilpatrick, assert that it means no more than ‘sir’;³⁵ while others, like Kingsbury, hold to an intermediate position, suggesting that Peter recognises Messianic power in Jesus.³⁶ To interpret κύριε as a cry of recognition, almost of worship, would be quite in keeping with an epiphany encounter, where

³² Luz, 1990a:408.

³³ See Davies and Allison, 1991:506.

³⁴ Davies and Allison, 1991:507.

³⁵ See Kilpatrick, 1990:207. He is conservative in his conclusions about the meaning of κύριος in the Gospels: “The use of κύριος as a title for Jesus is not to be found in Matthew,” Kilpatrick, 1990:211. His analysis is admirably detailed, but he does not take account of the possibility that κύριε is heightened when it is combined with the prayer language of the LXX Psalms; see comment on verse 30.

³⁶ See Kingsbury, 1975:111, Kingsbury, 1978:55.

terror gives way to deeper understanding; but it is out of keeping with the rest of this verse. κύριε here is best interpreted in context: εἰ σὺ εἶ refers to Peter's realisation that he is not seeing a φάντασμα but Jesus. It seems unwise then, to overload this single word κύριε with messianic and divine significance, when the opening phrase of Peter's speech is about recognising Jesus, not about acknowledging a revelation of who he is, (this is done by the other disciples in verse 33). The use of κύριε in verse 30 is subtly different, however; this change in emphasis is part of the progression of the story. κύριε here certainly carries with it the connotations of 'master', as the use of the verb κελεύω, to command, indicates.³⁷ There is a paradox in the use of this verb in the aorist imperative, however: to say 'command me' is to demand to be commanded. Lagrange observes that even Peter will not embark on this action without a command,³⁸ but it is not a command in the normal sense of the word, because it happens at Peter's insistence. It is interesting to note that Peter does not ask Jesus for permission, nor does he ask that Jesus give him the power to walk on water, but that Jesus command him to do this action. This is a strange combination of individual initiative and the discipline of responding to the master's orders. It is not surprising that Peter's request has drawn both positive and negative responses from readers through the ages: is this faith or presumption?³⁹

Verse 29

ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ἔλθέ. καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ πλοίου ὁ Πέτρος περιεπάτησεν ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα καὶ ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν.

Textual variations

There are two areas of textual variation in this verse: the addition or omission of the definite article with Πέτρος, and the verb ἦλθεν which some witnesses have as the infinitive, ἐλθεῖν. The latter variant is

³⁷ See Davies and Allison, 1991:507 and Schweizer, 1976:210 for discussions of how this verb is used in Matthew.

³⁸ See Lagrange, 1927:295.

³⁹ E.g. see Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, Ch. 6, line 55; also Tasker, 1961:145 for the view that it is presumption. Yet others see it illustrating Peter's primacy, e.g. see Albright and Mann, 1984:181; Green, 1953:194—"At this point we meet with the first of the four remarkable additions to the Markan framework designed to throw into relief the supreme authority of Peter, as Vicar of Christ on earth."

potentially the more significant. The infinitive ἐλθεῖν (ℵ¹, C², D, L, W, Θ, 073, 0106, *f*^{1,13}, etc.) has been used to argue that Peter never actually walked on the water at all. For instance, Tasker adopts this variant reading, calling it an infinitive of purpose, and takes περιεπάτησεν to be an inceptive aorist meaning ‘began to walk’, and concludes:

The narrative in its original form almost certainly does not imply that Peter even for a brief moment exercised the power which his master possessed.⁴⁰

The case for the infinitive ἐλθεῖν, however, is not strong enough to support such a shift in interpretation. The adoption of this variant seems to be driven by theological rather than textual concerns. Sibinga comments that ἐλθεῖν is sufficiently explained as a repetition from verse 28.⁴¹ Metzger sees the more clumsy καὶ ἦλθεν as original, and therefore explains ἐλθεῖν as a later contraction.⁴² Even if the infinitive were the earlier reading, it requires an idiosyncratic interpretation of περιεπάτησεν to exclude Peter from participation in this miracle.

Verse 30

βλέπων δὲ τὸν ἄνεμον ἰσχυρὸν ἐφοβήθη, καὶ ἄρξάμενος καταποντίζεσθαι ἔκραξεν λέγων· κύριε, σῶσόν με.

Textual Variants

The square brackets around ἰσχυρόν in the Nestle-Aland 27th edition indicate that it is a disputed textual variant. There is strong textual support for omitting this adjective (ℵ, B*, 073, 33, and the whole Sahidic and Bohairic manuscript traditions). Metzger suggests that it could have been accidentally dropped from one early manuscript and then that omission copied, since most of the texts which lack ἰσχυρόν belong to the same ‘family’ of Egyptian witnesses. On the other hand, he also points out that it could easily have been added in order to heighten the story.⁴³ Sibinga suggests that the shorter reading is more in keeping with Matthew’s style, where a participle is often followed only by its object without an adjective (2:10, 5:1, 9:4, 9:22, 9:23, 15:12, 21:15).

⁴⁰ Tasker, 1961:145.

⁴¹ See Sibinga, 1981:17.

⁴² See Metzger, 1971:37.

⁴³ See Metzger, 1971:38.

He also points out that it introduces a classical idiom, which is rare in Matthew.⁴⁴ Given the strength of the manuscript evidence, plus Sibinga's observations concerning Matthew's style, the weight of probability is against ἰσχυρόν being original, though the issue cannot be settled with any degree of certainty.

Vocabulary

When Peter cries out, κύριε, σῶσόν με, the words echo closely the cry of all the disciples in Mt 8:25, κύριε, σῶσόν.⁴⁵ The combination of the title κύριε with a cry so reminiscent of a prayer⁴⁶ suggests that κύριε is closer to a divine title here than in verse 28. This is in keeping with the unfolding of the narrative towards the confession in verse 33.

Verse 33

οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ λέγοντες· ἄληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ.

Vocabulary

The possible significance of the word order for θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ is disputed. Zerwick argues that the absence of the definite article is not necessarily significant to the meaning.⁴⁷ Lagrange, on the other hand, suggests that the omission of ὁ could be significant, because it is designed to “—laisser les choses dans un certain vague.”⁴⁸ Gundry asserts that the word order in this phrase is significant: it puts a particular stress on Jesus' deity.⁴⁹

What does the confession ἄληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ imply? Davies and Allison are emphatic that it refers to Jesus 'in his status as revealer of the Father,'⁵⁰ not as a miracle worker or 'divine man'; but this interpretation of the disciples' words relies on the idea that Jesus' actions

⁴⁴ See Sibinga, 1981:28–29, esp. 29, “—the addition of ἰσχυρόν did away with a difficulty and made for a more intelligible story. At the same time it introduced a classical idiom which is rare in Matthew.”

⁴⁵ See Davies and Allison, 1991:508; also Hagner, 1995:424.

⁴⁶ See e.g. LXX Psalms 7:2, 21:22, 30:17, 53:3, 68:2, 70:2, 108:26, 118:94.

⁴⁷ See Zerwick, 1974:48.

⁴⁸ Lagrange, 1927:297.

⁴⁹ See Gundry, 1982:301. On the other hand, does the phrase 'son of God' need any additional emphasis on divinity?

⁵⁰ See Davies and Allison, 1991:510.

(walking on water, stilling the storm) were self-evidently actions associated with YHWH.⁵¹

The use of the word ἀληθῶς links this confession with the words of the centurion in Mt 27:54.⁵² In that instance, too, there is some ambiguity about whether the phrase means “*the* Son of God” or “*a* son of God,” as the footnote in the NRSV indicates. Interestingly, the editors did not feel that such a footnote was necessary here in 14:33.

Conclusion

Although there are a number of textual variants in this passage, none of them makes a significant impact on its interpretation. The ἐλθεῖν variant in verse 29 has been used to argue unconvincingly for a change in interpretation, and it is interesting to reflect on what theological concerns drive this alteration. The σταδίους πολλούς variant in verse 24, because it is a departure from the Markan text, raises the question of sources, but does not provide enough evidence to answer it. Most of the significant questions about vocabulary arise on christological issues (verses 27, 28, 30, 33); this underlines the difficulty of uncovering a clear picture of what this passage said about Jesus to its first readers.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

A pericope of Jesus walking on the water appears in three of the four Gospels—Mark, Matthew and John. There are sufficient similarities between these accounts to suggest that they are three versions of the same story. The differences between the three accounts do raise some questions about their relationship, however. Matthew’s account largely resembles Mark’s in vocabulary and structure, although there are some key differences and expansions. Matthew’s pericope would support an assumption of Markan priority.⁵³ John’s account shares much less common vocabulary with the other two; it would be difficult to make a case for John’s literary dependence upon Mark in this instance.

The question arises, then, as to whether or not John 6:16–21 can be seen as coming from a genuinely independent source or whether

⁵¹ See discussion in the section on possible sources, pp. 51–67.

⁵² See Davies and Allison, 1991:510; Gundry, 1982:301; Patte, 1987:213.

⁵³ For a helpful summary of the development of this argument, see Evans, 2001: xiv–lviii.

it is simply a free adaptation of Mark 6:47–52, presumably made for John's own theological purposes. If John is an adaptation of Mark, then Mark represents the earliest tradition we have for this story and we have no point of comparison for considering what the pre-Gospel tradition might have been. If John 6:16–21 is from an independent source, then we do have such a point of comparison and common features between Mark and John, such as the link with the feeding of the five thousand, take on a new significance.

This specific question about John 6:16–21 has to be considered in the light of the general question of Johannine independence. Before Gardner-Smith's work in 1938, the prevailing theory was that John was dependent on the Synoptics and that any divergence from these gospels was made for theological reasons. Gardner-Smith's argument was that the evidence was better served by a theory of Johannine independence. Any similarity to the Synoptics could be attributed to a similarity in the pre-Gospel sources rather than dependence.⁵⁴

C.H. Dodd pursued this same issue in detail by examining a number of Johannine pericopae and logia which have some form of synoptic parallel.⁵⁵ His conclusion was startling: either John derived material from Mark, Matthew, Luke and Acts, or he shared some common threads of pre-Gospel tradition with all of them.⁵⁶ The possibility of the writer of John having access to all these texts seems far-fetched and so the idea of an early tradition parallel with synoptic sources seems more likely.⁵⁷

If this general argument about John's Gospel is applied specifically to John 6:16–21, the characteristics of this pericope seem to bear it out. It is similar to the Synoptic accounts, but certainly not identical. It is shorter and there is no mention of the disciples struggling to travel across the lake or their response of astonishment or faith at the miracle. This has prompted some critics to say that the Johannine pericope is the earliest form of the tradition, when the story took the pure form of

⁵⁴ See Gardner-Smith, 1938. His argument was that a theory of dependency would explain points of similarity between John and the Synoptics, but not seemingly 'untheological' points of divergence. Why would John make apparently arbitrary alterations? See Gardner-Smith, 1938:xi, 92.

⁵⁵ The passages discussed in Dodd, 1963 include parts of the passion narrative (pp. 79, 93); the feeding of the 5000 (p. 209); John the Baptist denying messianic status (p. 257); sayings about the mission of the apostles (p. 347) etc.

⁵⁶ See Dodd, 1963:423.

⁵⁷ See also Brown, 1966:254; Moody Smith, 2001:235.

an epiphany, without any secondary elements of miraculous rescue.⁵⁸ Some have also commented that the miracle itself is much more muted in John's Gospel, which they also take to be a characteristic of an early tradition; the later versions, they argue, steadily increase in miraculous elements, reaching their zenith in Matthew.⁵⁹ However, John's account does contain *two* miracles, Jesus walking on the water and the boat 'suddenly' arriving at its destination and what is taken by some to be a muted or understated style may have other explanations.⁶⁰

If John's account is from an independent pre-Gospel tradition, two inferences can be made. Firstly, the link between the pericope of the feeding of the five thousand and this pericope is shown to be pre-Markan.⁶¹ This considerably weakens the hypothesis that this story is a misplaced resurrection account, since the 'misplacing' would have had to happen so early in the tradition to have become established in (potentially) two different pre-Gospel sources⁶²—those which lie behind Mark and John. If John was dependent on Mark, then one could make a case for the connection being a Markan creation⁶³ which John reproduced, but if John is an independent witness to this connection, then a second early source confirms that this story belongs in the pre-crucifixion period. It is, of course, possible that this pericope was misplaced at an early date, but we have no way of establishing this, nor any intrinsic reason for suspecting it. Attempts, therefore, to establish on stylistic grounds that this story ought to have been a resurrection appearance at an earlier point in the tradition sound rather feeble.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ E.g. Bultmann, 1968:216, Guelich, 1989:346.

⁵⁹ See Davies and Allison, 1991:500.

⁶⁰ See Grigsby, 1989:296 and Witcamp, 1990:55 for the suggestion that John has crafted his account so that it takes the form of his sign tradition.

⁶¹ Accepted by e.g. Brown, 1960:254; Schnackenburg, 1980:25; Witcamp, 1990:45; Madden, 1997:94–95.

⁶² Attempts to reconstruct these sources are ingenious but fanciful. E.g., see Achtemeier, 1970:198–221.

⁶³ Snoy implies that the Markan connection could have been made by the Evangelist, even if Mark and John were independent. See Snoy, 1968:208. However, this theory relies on the unbelievable coincidence that Mark and John each decided independently to place walking on the water after the feeding of the 5000. Snoy highlights some real issues in Markan geography, (Snoy, 1968:208–210) but his conclusion that Mark has joined two completely independent pericopae effectively ignores the Johannine witness. Madden takes up Snoy's argument but modifies it: the problems with Markan geography indicate that at some earlier pre-Markan stage these two pericopae did not belong together. See Madden, 1997:96–99.

⁶⁴ Madden's argument relies on a series of characteristics which he claims are common to accounts of walking on the water and resurrection accounts (Madden,

Secondly, if John is from an independent source this has an impact on the historical value one can set on the Matthean episode of Peter walking on the water. It means that there are two early accounts, neither of which has the additional Peter episode. While it might have been possible to argue that Mark had for some reason omitted this episode or only had access to the abbreviated form,⁶⁵ the corroboration of the shorter form by John suggests that the Matthean addition is redactional.

These three accounts each contain unique features; they are differentiated by the narrated comments and different endings. The Markan καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς is a perplexing element in the story which almost certainly has christological implications. It is hard to make any sense of it except in the context of Old Testament theophanies (e.g. Exodus 33:22).⁶⁶ There is also a question to be asked about John 6:17b,

1997:116–130). As these characteristics are abstractions, the actual similarities can be quite slim, e.g. that Jesus returns to his disciples in the dark or near dawn, is difficult to recognise and commands his disciples not to fear. This ignores such obvious differences as the disciples' scream of fear that Jesus might be a φάντασμα (not a πνεῦμα), not to mention Jesus doing the sustained and spectacular miracle of walking on the water rather than simply appearing or disappearing. It is true that it is rare for Jesus to be separated from his disciples in preresurrection stories and it is unique for him to appear doing a miraculous action which is epiphanic in this way, but these characteristics simply illustrate what a strange story this is rather than giving a warrant for its relocation as a resurrection account. In the light of the combined witness of Mark and John that this story is a preresurrection miracle closely connected with the feeding of the 5000, I think it is wiser to accept the ordering as it appears in early tradition rather than overturn it for an argument based on form. This is also the final opinion of C.H. Dodd, from whom Madden derives most of his categories for examining resurrection accounts; see Dodd, 1968:121.

⁶⁵ The traditional version of this argument—that Mark's source Peter would be too shy to recount the incident (see Tasker, 1961:146) should not blind us to the fact that this argument could be put in more convincing terms: for instance, if the story is characterised as an epiphany which illustrates a high Christology (e.g. see Heil, 1981: 170–171), then Mark could have had a strong objection to Peter's participation in the miracle, as some more recent interpreters have, see Tasker, 1961:145; Garland, 1993:158–9.

⁶⁶ Fleddermann's attempt to connect Mark 6:48c with Amos 7:3, 7:6 and 7:8 LXX and translate '—and he wanted to pass by them,' as '—and he wanted to save them,' effectively ignores the element of divine judgement in the Amos passages. If YHWH is going to pass *through* (διέρχομαι) bringing destruction (cf. Amos 5:16–17), then it follows that to pass *by* (παρέρχομαι) is 'to relent', 'to save' in the sense of not bringing destruction. When Fleddermann transfers his suggestions to the Markan verse, he does not discuss how it applies when the element of divine judgment is lacking. It would be far-fetched to suggest that the very appearance of Jesus on the water implies impending judgement and it would, in any case, only complicate the original exegetical

οὐπω ἐληλύθει πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς. This addition does much more than clarify that the disciples are alone, it pre-empts the moment when Jesus will come to them and also emphasizes this interim period of darkness. Perhaps it relates to the common allegorical reading of this story as a depiction of the post-ascension, pre-parousia Christian community;⁶⁷ although this kind of eschatological theme does not seem particularly Johannine.

The story also ends differently in each account. The Markan expression of amazement is a familiar response to a miracle (ἐξίστημι, e.g. 2:12, 5:42) and is combined with the explanation that they did not understand about the loaves. This implies that a proper understanding about the nature of the feeding of the five thousand would have made walking on the water comprehensible. Why? What does the feeding miracle imply that would make the walking miracle understandable?⁶⁸ The Johannine ending is ambiguous. The force of εὐθέως in John, undiminished by its rare use, implies a miraculously instant arrival at their destination.⁶⁹ It is unclear whether Jesus entered the boat or not, because the stress is laid on the fact that the disciples wanted to take him on board. Why is this desire so important, and in what way does it and the miraculous arrival conclude the story? While Giblin overstates his case when he asserts that in John the story is really about the miraculous crossing of the sea and not the miracle of walking on the water at all, he has a point that the completed sea crossing is a neglected theme in many discussions of this passage.⁷⁰

In the context of these perplexing variations, the Matthean confession is yet another conclusion to the story. In fact, apart from some ambiguity about the implications of θεοῦ υἱός, it is the most accessible of the three, with the disciples vocalising their reaction to what has happened. There is clearly an epiphanic element in each of the Gospel accounts of this story, yet the use of different expressions in the narration and different conclusions to the story make it difficult to

puzzle. See Fleddermann, 1983:389–95. Van der Loos' decision to translate καί as "for" instead of "and", so that the phrase reads, "for he would have passed their way" is also unsatisfactory. See Van der Loos, 1965:652–653.

⁶⁷ E.g. see Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matthaeum*, chapter 14:14; Fenton, 1963:244–245; Gundry, 1982:299.

⁶⁸ Guelich suggests that the feeding of the 5000 depicts Jesus as the promised eschatological shepherd. See Guelich, 1989:352.

⁶⁹ See Schnackenburg, 1980:27; Giblin, 1983:98; Grigsby, 1989:296.

⁷⁰ See Giblin, 1983:96–97.

discern the implications being drawn. Jesus is the one who comes to his disciples, but he is also the one who wants to pass them by. In his presence, the wind drops or the boat miraculously arrives at its destination. Most strangely of all, Peter witnesses an epiphany and then begs to participate in it. Perhaps this story has always been theologically unstable, stimulating divergent comments and interpretations. Is this why Luke omits it all together?

There is one strong common element between the accounts, the bond with the feeding of the five thousand. The fact that this bond is pre-Gospel and that John decides to preserve it suggests that it is not only traditional but theological:⁷¹ for both Mark and John these stories make sense together. This is so, even if present day commentators find it puzzling and uncongenial. Meier is surely right to pursue an interpretation of walking on the water which is both eucharistic and christological, thus giving due weight to this traditional arrangement.⁷²

POSSIBLE SOURCES

Old Testament

Heil's 1981 monograph *Jesus Walking on the Water* argues that there is a clear Old Testament background to this pericope. Heil does not commit himself on the question of whether the Old Testament material he highlights is the actual source of the New Testament story, but others have gone on to draw this conclusion.⁷³ The close relationship which he proposes does tend to exclude the search for other possible influences or sources,⁷⁴ however, since it claims to give a detailed explanation of the Gospel motif solely from Old Testament passages. This makes his work attractive to those who want to draw a clear line of separation between Judaeo-Christian tradition and any other cultural

⁷¹ The suggestion that John simply preserved the order of his original source and attached no significance to this story is absurd. This is the evangelist who moved the cleansing of the temple from one end of Jesus' life to the other. As Witkamp expresses it, "It would *a priori* be unlikely that John would have recounted the lake-story only because of a servile faithfulness to his source. Both his hermeneutic theory and the way he actually used other parts of the Jesus tradition point in another direction." Witkamp, 1990:55.

⁷² Meier, 1994:922–924.

⁷³ E.g. see Meier, 1994:914, 921.

⁷⁴ For instance, in hellenistic or Buddhist texts; for a different approach, see Luz, 1990a:407–8; Brown, 1928 etc.

tradition.⁷⁵ If Heil is correct, then the sometimes troubling question⁷⁶ of the influences which shaped the composition of this pericope has already been answered.

Heil maintains that walking on the water would be recognised by the reader (or hearer) familiar with the Old Testament as a characteristic action of YHWH. This would make the action of Jesus a startling but comprehensible epiphany.

The basis of Heil's claim is Job 9:8b:

נִשָּׂה שָׁמַיִם לְבָדּוֹ וְדוֹרָךְ עַל-בִּמְתֵי יָם
(Job 9:8, BHS)

- καὶ περιπατῶν ὡς ἐπ’ ἐδάιφους ἐπὶ θαλάσσης. (Job 9:8, LXX)
- and trampled the waves of the Sea; (Job 9:8, NRSV).

The only ambiguous word in this context is בִּמְתֵי the plural feminine construct of בִּמְתָּ. The word can be defined as ‘back’, or ‘hill’, or ‘a Canaanite grave’, or ‘a high place of worship.’⁷⁷ Heil suggests that בִּמְתֵי is a metaphorical word for ‘back’; if God treads upon ‘the back of the sea’, this may allude to Ugaritic creation mythology, where the god Baal overcomes the power of chaos by defeating the sea monster Yamm.⁷⁸ Pope suggests that it reflects a version of the Babylonian creation myth, where Marduk splits the carcass of Tiamat and uses one half to make the sky.⁷⁹ Authorities are divided, however, on just how strong Old Testament allusions to Ancient Near Eastern myths are,

⁷⁵ Luz suggests that many scholars exclude a priori hellenistic texts from the discussion of sources, see Luz, 1990a:407. The emphatic quality of some scholars’ comments bears this out: ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ refers to Jesus “in his status as revealer of the Father,” (Davies and Allison, 1991:510); “—there is no basis whatever in this expression for an assertion that this is a Hellenistic appellation.” (Albright and Mann, 1984:181). Heil himself does not even discuss the possibility of hellenistic sources for the pericope; see Heil, 1981.

⁷⁶ E.g. see Cullmann, 1963:277; although hostile to Bultmann’s thesis of a hellenistic ‘miracle worker’ background to the title ‘Son of God’ in the synoptic gospels (see Bultmann, 1968:236–7), he feels forced to admit that Mt 14:33 might be the exception. Cullmann appears to be so irritated by this anomaly that he goes on to say that “—even within Matthew itself it has no special significance whatsoever,” and claims that “according to the structure of the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples actually first recognised Jesus in Mt. 16:16,” a clear case of theology triumphing over experience.

⁷⁷ See Koehler-Baumgartner, 1994; also Brown, Driver and Briggs, 1968:119.

⁷⁸ See Heil, 1981:40.

⁷⁹ See Pope, 1974:70. Caution must be used here in relation to definite OT references to ANE myths. There are, however, some OT refs. which seem to reflect a version of some ANE tradition concerning sea monsters, e.g. Job 7:12; Psalm 74:13+14; Isaiah 27:1, 51:9; Ezekiel 29:3, 32:2.

and so they should be treated with some caution. Recent studies have repudiated what had been taken to be established links.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Job 9:8b does communicate some sense of victory or domination, even if it is not based directly on a Ugaritic or Babylonian myth; the NRSV conveys this by translating וַיִּדְרֹךְ as ‘trampled’ rather than ‘walked’.

In Heil’s argument, this element of domination over the sea becomes the crucial link between Job 9:8b and a number of other Old Testament passages which mention God dominating the sea:⁸¹ Hab. 3:15, Psalm 77:20, Isaiah 43:16, 51:9–10, Wisdom 14:1–4. It is in this way that he develops his claim that there is a clear Old Testament motif of YHWH walking on the sea, as walking on the sea is simply a subcategory of the larger theme of dominating the sea. This automatic link between walking on the sea and domination shapes Heil’s interpretation of Mt 14:22–33, giving an almost allegorical result:

The fact that Jesus himself crosses the sea means that it is now crossable for his disciples and thus results in their rescue. This is evident from the meaning of the aspects of dominance and of crossing in the sea-walking motif. Jesus is dominating the sea by walking on it. That means that the power of the sea is being defeated and conquered by the act of Jesus crossing it. The particular power that the sea is exercising is its power to prevent the disciples from crossing it. So the fact that Jesus dominates the sea by walking or crossing over it is all-important. It indicates that it is precisely the power of the sea to prevent the disciples from crossing it that is being defeated by the very act of Jesus himself crossing it. Since Jesus dominates the sea, that is, completely defeats its power, it can no longer prevent the disciples from crossing it.⁸²

Heil’s interpretation of this pericope is distorted by his use of the Old Testament rather than clarified by it. It is by no means obvious that the key aspect of Jesus walking on the sea in Matthew’s gospel is that he is dominating and defeating it or that this theme is “all-important”. The disciples are prevented from crossing the sea by the contrary wind, rather than by the sea itself (verse 24b). Although it is stated that the boat is harassed by the waves (verse 24a), there is no mention here of the disciples’ fear in the face of the storm, as in Mt 8:25; nor does Jesus rebuke the winds and the sea, as in Mt 8:26. The sea, as such, is

⁸⁰ E.g. See Brueggemann, 1997:147, “—the imagery of struggle in combat, as it relates to creation, is subdued and marginal in the Old Testament.” For a view that the OT association with these myths is very close, see Hartley, 1988:168.

⁸¹ The majority refer to the parting of the Reed Sea. See Heil, 1981:37–67.

⁸² Heil, 1981:50.

not presented as a hostile force, but as the medium upon which Jesus and Peter walk.

The Septuagintal version of Job 9:8b is also relevant here:

– καὶ περιπατῶν ὡς ἐπ’ ἐδάϊφους ἐπὶ θαλάσσης.

Here we have the specific use of the verb *περιπατέω* in the form in which it occurs in Mt 14:25b; we also have the preposition *ἐπὶ*. The nuance of treading down or dominating is gone, and there is a new interest in describing the manner of God’s walking: he walks ὡς ἐπ’ ἐδάϊφος.⁸³ The changes between the Massoretic and the Septuagintal texts do not support Heil’s theory about the importance of a motif of dominance. The Septuagintal reading is much closer in wording to Matthew 14:25, and yet the theme of dominance and victory has been removed. If Heil’s theory was correct, one would expect the Septuagintal version to confirm the important link with YHWH dominating the sea.

Heil’s argument for the Old Testament background to this story is like an inverted pyramid, standing on the fragile point of half a verse in Job and unsupported by the Septuagint. It is a bold and detailed attempt to set the Gospel ‘walking’ stories within an adequate framework of Old Testament reference and allusion, but it fails at the point that he makes such a close link between Job 9:8b and references to the crossing of the Reed Sea. There is simply not enough explicit material to establish that there was a familiar Old Testament motif of YHWH walking on the water;⁸⁴ and so it follows that we cannot demonstrate that Matthew is consciously drawing on such a tradition. Thus Meier’s conclusion that the story of Jesus walking on the water is a kind of pious creation embroidered according to traditional Old Testament themes cannot be substantiated.⁸⁵ Walking on the sea does not appear in Old Testament narratives, nor does it appear sufficiently clearly in poetry for it to be established as a characteristic action of YHWH.⁸⁶

Certain aspects of the scenery of the gospel story—the sea (or ‘the deep’), the darkness (particularly just before dawn) and the strong

⁸³ See the discussion in Heil, 1981:40–41.

⁸⁴ There is also no clear description of walking on the water as a characteristic action of YHWH in Rabbinic Targums, see Strack und Billerbeck, 1922:688–691.

⁸⁵ See Meier, 1994:291.

⁸⁶ Contra Davies and Allison, 1991:504, “Clearly the theophanic action of Yahweh has become the epiphanic action of Jesus.”

wind—are also common to two prominent Old Testament narratives—the creation in Genesis 1 and the crossing of the Reed Sea in Exodus 14. Since these are stories which reverberate throughout Jewish tradition, it may be more fruitful to seek Old Testament links to the Gospel story through these kind of narrative echoes rather than in specific precedents. The action of walking on the water itself remains mysterious, but the scenery against which the story is told may carry Old Testament allusions.

Genesis 1:1–2

The scenery of the opening verses of Genesis: darkness, ‘the deep’, and the wind, are all mirrored in Mt 14:22–33, especially in the opening verses 23 and 24, and also verse 30. In Genesis 1:2, the phrase רוח אלהים can be translated in several different ways: רוח could mean wind or spirit, אלהים could mean ‘God’ or could be simply a superlative qualifying ‘wind’—so that the phrase would mean ‘strong wind’. Wenham points out that this combination is not used elsewhere in the Old Testament simply to mean ‘strong wind’, so that the use of אלהים as a superlative rather than a reference to God in this context would be unique.⁸⁷ The NRSV has translated this phrase “a wind from God”, holding something of each interpretation. Westermann suggests that רוח אלהים means ‘a violent wind’, making it part, with the ‘darkness’ and the ‘desert waste’, of the picture of chaos.⁸⁸

The darkness, the deep and the wind reappear in the scenery of the archetypal miracle of the Jewish tradition, the crossing of the Reed Sea.

Exodus 14:20

Durham translates v. 20b as, “there was the cloud and the darkness—there was no other light in the night.”⁸⁹ He suggests that a deliberate contrast is being made here between this night and other nights: the pillar of fire is absent, and instead the pillar of cloud, the daytime guide, is between the Israelites and the Egyptians, “which only added to the obscurity of the darkness.”⁹⁰ (See also the retelling of this part of the

⁸⁷ See Wenham, 1987:17.

⁸⁸ See Westermann, 1988:8.

⁸⁹ Durham, 1987:189.

⁹⁰ Durham, 1987:193.

story in Joshua 24:7a NRSV, “When they cried out to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians.”)

This story also has the wind: see Exodus 14:21. The time of day also bears some similarities: rescue comes at dawn (Exodus 14:24, also 14:27); in Matthew, there is also a mention of the fourth watch of the night, possibly just before the dawn (verse 25).

Both these narratives became touchstone descriptions of God’s power: they are alluded to in other Old Testament texts.⁹¹ There are three passages (Psalm 74:12–17, Isaiah 43:15–16 and Isaiah 51:9–15) where God is described as Creator and Saviour by reference to both these narratives together. In discussing Isaiah 51:9–10, Brueggemann offers the following comment:

In this text, what must have been creation imagery is tilted toward the specificity of Israel’s Exodus memory, so that ‘the sea’ and ‘the waters of the great deep’ serve doubly in Israel’s rhetoric as the watery, threatening chaos in the arena of creation and as the escape route of the Exodus.⁹²

These narrative and poetic references, when considered in conjunction with one another, could form the background to the scenery in the narrative of Jesus and Peter walking on the water. This is a much more tenuous link than the clearly defined Old Testament motif of walking on the water which Heil sought to establish, but better a tenuous link based on substantial evidence than a strong theory based on very little. If the scenery does carry a symbolic meaning, this might be part of the reason for the uncharacteristic temporal and geographical details in this pericope.

The source of the central action of the pericope, walking on the water, remains mysterious. The assertion that it is a characteristic Old Testament action of YHWH is unwarranted. The scenery of the story could be designed to reflect the accounts of creation and the crossing of the Reed Sea. Peter’s cry of distress could be designed to evoke the language of the Psalms,⁹³ but these links are simply possible allusions

⁹¹ E.g. God as Creator: Psalms 89:9, 93:4, 95:5, 146:6, 148:7; Proverbs 8:29; Jonah 1:9. God parting the sea is referred to in Psalms 18:15, 66:6, 74:13, 77:19, 78:13+53, 106:7+9+22, 136:13.

⁹² Brueggemann, 1997:147.

⁹³ See comment on the vocabulary of verse 30, p. 44.

or associations and are too insubstantial to venture any theory that this story has a purely Old Testament source.

A Buddhist Context?

Brown, in his 1928 work, *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water*, puts forward the thesis that the gospel tradition of Jesus walking on the water comes entirely from a Buddhist source.⁹⁴ His argument covers three main points—a close comparison of Christian and Buddhist texts, a suggested pre-Christian dating for the relevant Buddhist tradition, and a possible scenario as to how and why the borrowing of this tradition might have come about.

Brown claims that there is an uncanny similarity between some Buddhist and Christian texts, particularly between Matthew 14:28–31 and Jataka 190.⁹⁵ The Jatakas are ancient stories of the past which are then identified with the writer’s present and with the life of the Buddha.⁹⁶ Jataka 190 tells the story of a disciple who manages to walk on water while he maintains his contemplation of the Buddha, but who begins to sink when his contemplation is disturbed. He then recovers his concentration and finishes his water-crossing safely. Brown’s claims are supported by Stehly, who draws the following parallels between the texts:⁹⁷

	<i>Matthew 14</i>	<i>Jataka 190</i>
<i>Time</i>	Night	Evening
<i>Actor</i>	Peter	Disciple
<i>Action</i>	Walking on the Water	Walking on the Water
<i>By means of</i>	Πίστις (faith)	Pīti (faith)
<i>Next event</i>	Interruption of the walk	Interruption of the walk
<i>Caused by</i>	Seeing winds Loss of πίστις	Seeing waves Loss of pīti

These parallels are certainly present, but both Brown and Stehly neglect to draw up a corresponding set of narrative contrasts. For instance, a table could be drawn up like this:

⁹⁴ See Brown, 1923:x, also 59–61.
⁹⁵ See Appendix for Burlingame’s translation of this text, quoted in Brown, 1923:27.
⁹⁶ See De, 1951:xii.
⁹⁷ See Stehly, 1977:435–6.

	<i>Matthew 14</i>	<i>Jataka 190</i>
<i>Actor</i>	with disciples, then Jesus	alone
<i>2nd Action</i>	is rescued by Jesus	recovers skill of walking
<i>Walks because...</i>	command	own volition
<i>Purpose</i>	unknown? To reach Jesus?	to get to the other side
<i>End result</i>	worship of Jesus	enquiry about whether journey was tiring
<i>Skill</i>	immediately acquired	acquired through long discipline

All such an exercise illustrates is the caution which must be exercised in the drawing up of comparisons. It is possible, by citing isolated details, to make a herring sound like a seagull, but when one sees the two together the comparison is found to be wanting. The comparison suggested by Stehly similarly consists of isolated details, without a wider consideration of either Judaeo-Christian or Buddhist traditions. There is no discussion of whether πίστις and pīti are really equivalent ideas of faith, for instance.⁹⁸

Brown does provide several helpful translations of Sanskrit texts reflecting the wider Buddhist context for the ability to walk on water. Discussions of this action as a supernatural ability occur in *Digha Nikaya*, the *Patañjali* Yoga system and Hemacandra's *Trisastisalākāpurusaśāstra*.⁹⁹ The first two of these documents both mention walking on the water within a whole cluster of spiritual accomplishments, which include walking through walls, becoming visible and invisible at will, and stroking the moon and the sun. The *Patañjali* Yoga system clearly suggests that there are stages in the spiritual skills of defying gravity: the yogin becomes lighter until he can walk on water, he then becomes lighter still so that he can walk on cobwebs, and finally so light that he can walk on sunbeams.¹⁰⁰ This fits with Brown's assertion that walking on water is a lesser spiritual skill than levitation or flying; for instance, the Buddha always flies across water, never merely walks on it.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Stehly's suggestion that they sound similar is hardly an adequate exploration. See Stehly, 1977:435.

⁹⁹ See Brown, 1928:15–16.

¹⁰⁰ See Brown, 1928:16.

¹⁰¹ See Brown, 1928:18.

The action of walking on the water has a different role within Buddhist tradition than within the New Testament. Stehly takes this into account when he suggests that the Buddhist motifs which he has uncovered in the Bible have obviously been adapted and given a new form in their Jewish or Christian environment; there is therefore not an exact textual correspondence between the traditions.¹⁰² This point does seem to undermine his previous argument which was based on the notion that the texts are so similar, however. Without any corroborating historical evidence, an argument based simply on a comparison of the texts is interesting but inadequate.

The dating of Buddhist traditions

Brown admits that the earliest written source of the Jatakas can only be dated to the fifth century C.E.¹⁰³ He suggests, however, that the oral tradition behind these stories of walking on the water is linked to the *Rigveda*, and therefore goes back to the eighth century B.C.E.¹⁰⁴ It is notoriously difficult to date textual sources which began in oral tradition, and one might think that Brown is stretching a point in order to facilitate his argument; but on the issue of the dating of Buddhist traditions of walking on the water he has considerable support.

Both Brown and Stehly point to evidence from sculptures. There is a bas-relief which illustrates a story of the Buddha flying across the water which can be dated to the first century B.C.E.¹⁰⁵ On the issue of dating, then, it would be possible to postulate a link between Jataka 190 (or its oral predecessor) and Mt 14:28–31. The next question is how and why such links might have come about.

Possible Scenarios

Stehly, Derrett and Brown all assert that links between India and Israel were possible, or even probable, in the first century B.C.E. or first century C.E. Derrett mentions the sending out of Buddhist missionaries by Aśoka to the West around 264 B.C.E.¹⁰⁶ Stehly suggests that this

¹⁰² See Stehly, 1977:436.

¹⁰³ See Brown, 1928:28.

¹⁰⁴ See Brown, 1928:29.

¹⁰⁵ See Brown, 1928:20; Stehly, 1977:436.

¹⁰⁶ See Derrett, 1962:257. Brown mentions textual evidence for this, namely Aśoka's 13th Rock Edict. See Brown, 1928:63. What we have no evidence for is the success of this Buddhist mission.

tradition may have reached the Gospel writers via the Essenes.¹⁰⁷ These links are certainly possible, but evidence of the presence of Buddhist missionaries in a specific place, (Antioch, for instance) is completely lacking. The only evidence rests in the perceived similarities between various texts.¹⁰⁸ In this way, the argument becomes circular: there are similarities in the texts because cultural exchanges took place; cultural exchanges took place because there are similarities in the texts.

Brown speculates that Christian disciples, on hearing Buddhist stories of walking and flying across water, wanted to re-apply this tradition to Christ.¹⁰⁹ Although the Buddha always flies across water and never walks, Brown suggests the following reason for the story about Jesus involving walking rather than flying:

—we may perhaps speculate to the effect that flying across the water was too much for the Christian community to accept, and they compromised on the lesser and more credible, but to them equally novel, miracle of walking on the water.¹¹⁰

This scenario is the least plausible part of Brown's argument. He has managed to make the formation of Gospel tradition sound like a discussion among political spin-doctors. Moreover, several questions remain unanswered: in a culture where both ideas were 'novel', why would walking on the water be more credible than flying? Is it realistic to suggest that there was not only cultural contact but a sufficient interweaving of cultural tradition that it was both acceptable and desirable to the Gospel writers to present Jesus as a type of eastern holy man?

The comparison of these Buddhist and Christian texts highlights the point that they both have traditions connected with walking on the water. On closer examination, it is possible to see that the action has a different significance within the wider context of each religion: in Buddhism it is one of a number of spiritual skills developed by the disciple nearing Nirvana, in Christianity it is primarily a miraculous sign revealing something about Jesus. It is striking that both traditions have a story about a disciple who begins walking on the water, only

¹⁰⁷ See Stehly, 1977:437. Another suggestion is that there was a link via hellenistic ideas of a divine man to eastern spiritual practices, cf. the visit of Apollonius to India, see Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, Book III, chapters XV–XXV.

¹⁰⁸ These rest on a number of texts, not only Mt. 14:29f., e.g. Derrett's theory about Jubilees 28:6–7; see Derrett, 1962.

¹⁰⁹ See Brown, 1928:60–61.

¹¹⁰ Brown, 1928:61.

to start to sink; but even Jataka 190 and Matthew 14:29–33 have as many narrative contrasts as similarities. It might almost be as convincing to suggest that the Christian story has a polemical relation to the Buddhist one, and that a contrast between the Buddha and Jesus is intended.¹¹¹ There is no evidence, however, that Matthew intends any kind of dialogue with Buddhist tradition. The dating of the Buddhist tradition as pre-common era means that it is theoretically possible that it influenced the gospel traditions, although we have no historical evidence to establish this link. The case for a Buddhist source or sources for this pericope remains unproven, but it does point to the need for a wider examination of the possible range of cultural influences which may have coloured early Christianity.

Hellenistic Background

There are a number of narratives about the gods walking, running and riding on the water in hellenistic literature. Poseidon, for instance, rides his chariot through the waves without even dampening the bronze axle;¹¹² and he grants the ability to walk and run across the sea to his son Euphemus.¹¹³ As Maddon comments, none of these stories correspond closely to the Gospel pericopae of Jesus walking on the water.¹¹⁴ It is possible, however, that he has underestimated their significance. It is true that they are not credible as direct textual sources,¹¹⁵ but perhaps they are part of a more general cultural resource of ideas, including the idea that walking on the water is an attribute of the gods. Even if these narratives may not be the quarry from which the story of Jesus walking on the water was cut, they could shape the way that it was told and the expectation with which it was read.

The impression that walking on the water was commonly understood as the prerogative of the gods is strengthened by the metaphorical use of the motif in some texts. For instance, when Xerxes spans the

¹¹¹ Such a contrast might include: the presence of Jesus, the absence of the Buddha; the command of Jesus, the decision of the Buddha's disciple; the rescue of Peter, the self-recovery of the Buddha's disciple, etc.

¹¹² See Homer's *The Iliad*, XIII, lines 29–30.

¹¹³ See Apollonius Rhodius, *The Argonautica*, Book I, lines 182–3.

¹¹⁴ See Maddon, 1997:61.

¹¹⁵ Maddon (Maddon, 1997:57) is right to criticise Bultmann's citations: Bultmann refers to Xerxes (in Dio Chrysostom) having the power to walk on water, calling it hyperbole rather than revealing that it is a metaphor about the bridge. See Bultmann, 1968:230.

Hellespont with a bridge, this is described as “marching his troops across the sea”¹¹⁶ and as “a memorial which would mark more than human power.”¹¹⁷ Even Herodotus, who seems more interested in the engineering than the spiritual implications,¹¹⁸ includes in his account that Xerxes rebuked the Hellespont and ordered that it should be whipped with three hundred lashes after the first bridge had collapsed, and chastised with the words, καὶ βασιλεὺς μὲν Ξέρξης διαβήσεται σε, ἦν τε σύ γε βουλή ἦν τε μή.¹¹⁹ Dio Chrysostom compares Xerxes’ feat with Homer’s description of Poseidon riding the waves in his chariot.¹²⁰ In the same text, an interrogator of Socrates describes walking on the water as one example of what a powerful man who was not inferior to the gods would be able to do.¹²¹ The fact that building a bridge (even an ambitious one) evoked the metaphor or simile of walking on the water like a god suggests that the narratives of the gods walking or riding on the water needed no clarification because they were commonplace.

Josephus continues this trend in his description of Gaius Caligula. He is deeply critical of Gaius’ mad insolence (τῆς ὕβρεως τὴν μανίαν).¹²² One example of this is the bridge that he built across the bay of Baiae from Dicaearchia to Misenum, because he claimed that to drive across the sea in his chariot rather than using a boat better fitted his godly status (θεῶ γὰρ ὄντι τοιαύτας ποιεῖσθαι καλῶς ἔχειν τὰς ὁδοὺς).¹²³ Bridging the bay is not just cited as an example of an unnecessary and grandiose scheme, but as an example of spiritual pride; the symbolic action of riding across the bay was taken as conveying Caligula’s self-appointed divine status. Josephus’ work demonstrates that these ideas were known in a Jewish-Hellenistic context around the time in which the Gospels were being written. We cannot demonstrate that the writers and first readers of the Gospels would have made the same associations in connection with a story of Jesus walking on the water, but this is certainly possible, because of the known interplay between Jewish

¹¹⁶ See Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, section 89.

¹¹⁷ See Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, section 89, βουλευθεὶς δὲ τοιοῦτον μνημεῖον καταλιπεῖν ὃ μὴ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεώς ἐστιν.

¹¹⁸ E.g. he explains how the strain on the new cables was lightened. See Herodotus, Book VII, Chapter 36.

¹¹⁹ See Herodotus, Book VII, Chapter 36.

¹²⁰ See Dio Chrysostom, *The Third Discourse on Kingship*, section 31.

¹²¹ See Dio Chrysostom, *The Third Discourse on Kingship*, section 30.

¹²² Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book XIX, section 1.

¹²³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book XIX, section 6.

and hellenistic ideas. The hellenistic motif seems to fit very well in Matthew's account with its concluding confession, ἄληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ. This raises a significant theological and historical question: does this story reveal an underlying 'divine man' Christology?

The 'divine man' (θεῖος ἀνὴρ)

Studies on the theme of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ are wide-ranging in their examination of hellenistic and biblical texts.¹²⁴ This is both a strength and a disadvantage: a wide range of possible evidence is discussed but it may be alluded to very briefly with scant attention to details of context and genre.¹²⁵ This sometimes leads to an argument which is curiously detached from the actual texts under discussion; a kind of over-arching theory which is then supported by a bed of fragments quarried from diverse sources. The notion of a pre-Gospel aretalogy is an example: if you begin by accepting that such a collection of miracles showing Jesus to be a θεῖος ἀνὴρ preceded Mark's Gospel, then it is possible to select the sections of the Gospel supposedly derived from this earlier source.¹²⁶ The very concept of an ancient aretalogy is an abstraction, however, with composite characteristics taken from diverse sources. As Morton Smith himself admits, "No text identified in the manuscript as a ἀρεταλογία has come down to us."¹²⁷

The story of Jesus walking on the water is sometimes cited as a clear example of a New Testament use of the hellenistic concept of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ.¹²⁸ This theory can only be evaluated within a larger discussion of the depiction of Jesus throughout the Gospels. Some comprehensive questions arise about how compatible a 'divine man' Christology would have been with the ethos of early Christianity.

A key issue not sufficiently discussed in this context is the cross. Could Jesus have been convincingly presented as a θεῖος ἀνὴρ when he met such an ignominious end? Some of the common threads of hellenistic tradition are that a divine man is both noble and wise, he is not just

¹²⁴ E.g. Betz, 1968; Smith, 1971.

¹²⁵ E.g. Smith's citations of Justin's *Apology* and Origen's *Against Celsus* (see Smith, 1971:178, 180) take no account of the genre of apologetic, where the language and categories of thought of an opponent can be adopted for the sake of argument without any implication that they are accepted by the writer.

¹²⁶ E.g. see Betz, 1968:117–120; Smith, 1971:197.

¹²⁷ Smith, 1971:176. See also the sceptical evaluation of the similarities in Meier 1994:596–601.

¹²⁸ E.g. see Betz, 1968:119.

protected or vindicated by the gods but can protect himself by his own superior nature or divine power; Apollonius, for instance, miraculously leaves Domitian in the court where he is accused and reappears to his followers in Dicaearchia.¹²⁹ Would an aretalogy about an executed man ever have really gained a circulation? Paul is an early New Testament witness to the seriousness of this problem:

—we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 1:23, NRSV)

If first century ‘Gentiles’ (ἔθνοι) perceived this story as ‘foolishness’ (μωρία), it seems unlikely that it could have been told in a ‘divine man’ genre¹³⁰ without some kind of apologetic explanation of why the cross is not ‘foolish’. Where, then, within the proposed pre-Gospel aretalogy, is the distinctively hellenistic apologetic for the cross? Without this element, a document presenting Jesus as a ‘divine man’ would surely be ridiculed.

Smith’s solution is that an aretalogy about Jesus, beginning with his baptism and ending with the transfiguration, may have circulated during Jesus’ own lifetime.¹³¹ If this was the case, a seismic shift in understanding would be required to adapt this provisional presentation of Jesus to the later circumstances of the crucifixion. In fact, it would involve such a radical alteration that the idea of Jesus as a θεῖος ἀνὴρ would become a proto-Christian view rather than an early Christian one. This undermines Smith’s argument that the θεῖος ἀνὴρ is the dominant concept in early christology.

Betz suggests that the pre-synoptic divine man christology regarded the death and suffering of Jesus as non-essential to the Christian message and as a “failure that God has made good by raising Jesus from the dead.”¹³² Given the enormity of the “failure”, is it not more likely that the crucifixion would be a major influence on early christology, rather than a “non-essential” part of the message? Like a piece of grit

¹²⁹ See Philostratus’ life of Apollonius, Book VIII, Chapters VIII–XII.

¹³⁰ See Smith, 1971:175–179 for his description of this genre.

¹³¹ See Smith, 1971:197.

¹³² Betz, 1968:129. The idea that God vindicated Jesus by the resurrection seems a much more Old Testament concept than a θεῖος ἀνὴρ one: God protects the faithful, Psalm 16:9–11; the image of the suffering servant, Isaiah 53:11–12, etc.

to an oyster, this event must be turned into a pearl or it will threaten the wellbeing of the whole tradition.¹³³

Another issue is the difference between hellenistic polytheism and Hebraic monotheism. Smith's work has brought to light some elements of magical thinking and practice within the Gospels which have often been neglected;¹³⁴ it is helpful to realise that first century Jews and Christians were not living in a hermetically sealed monotheistic culture but were part of a world where a variety of supernatural explanations for events were commonplace.¹³⁵ This does not mean that different patterns of cultural and religious thought were blended entirely, however. For instance, the belief that Jesus is 'the son of God' must take on a different connotation if one believes that there is only one God than if one believes in a pantheon and their demi-god offspring.¹³⁶ The satirist Lucian bears this out by grouping Christians, not with θεῖος ἄνθρωπος devotees, but with atheists and Epicureans.¹³⁷ Even from the outside, early Christianity was not perceived as a 'divine man' cult.

It is important not to make a simplistic link between θεῖος ἄνθρωπος and θεοῦ υἱός and conclude that there is a clear 'divine man' christology behind Matthew's story of Jesus walking on the water. Larger issues such as the crucifixion and the Jewish roots of the Christian faith would have been obstacles to seeing Jesus as a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος from the earliest days of Christian tradition. The theories of Betz and Morton Smith that the accounts of miracles such as walking on the water are the tip of an iceberg of original and submerged θεῖος ἄνθρωπος tradition thus appear unlikely. However, it is possible that familiarity with the idea of a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος might have made this story an attractive and significant tradition for early followers of Jesus.

Conclusion

The sources for this pericope remain elusive. It is not a story which flows seamlessly from Old Testament tradition, as many assert.¹³⁸ The

¹³³ See Dodd, 1936:110, "The earliest Gospel is pre-eminently a Gospel of the Passion."

¹³⁴ E.g. see the references to the idea that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead, Mt. 14:2, 16:14.

¹³⁵ See Meier, 1994:535–601.

¹³⁶ Smith says that such arguments are "—obviously trivial," but does not really answer them. See Smith, 1971:192.

¹³⁷ See Lucian's *Alexander the False Prophet*, section 38.

¹³⁸ See e.g. Heil, 1981:56; Meier, 1994:921; Davies and Allison, 1991:509–510.

scenery of the sea, the darkness and the wind may contain some echo of Genesis 1:1–2 and Exodus 14:20–21, and the phrasing of Peter’s cry for help may recall similar cries in the Psalms. It seems unlikely that the story comes from a Buddhist source; the argument for this is based solely on perceived textual similarities and the motif is not a good match with the New Testament story. There is a strong tradition in hellenistic literature that walking or riding upon the water is the prerogative of the gods. Since this idea is present in the works of Josephus, it is possible to postulate that it was known by Matthew and his first readers. Perhaps the only positive conclusion we can draw from this examination of potential sources is that this miracle story may have conveyed a message about the divine status of Jesus to its first hearers, even though it seems unlikely that they would have interpreted this solely as a claim that he was a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος. Perhaps ideas like the ‘divine man’, rather than shaping early Christian thought, were received into Christian tradition in a form already mediated by Judaism.¹³⁹

IN SEARCH OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS—CRITERIA AND ARGUMENTS

Much of the work which aims to make a judgment on the question of whether Jesus walked on the water or not has been done in the context of the quest for the historical Jesus. In an attempt to regulate and focus historical judgements about the possible events behind Gospel passages, ‘criteria’ were developed. These ‘criteria’ now have a long and venerable heritage.¹⁴⁰ Historical work which proceeds according to openly stated criteria has the advantage of being transparent in its method and potentially consistent in its approach.¹⁴¹ However, its results can only be as good as the criteria which produced them.

A criterion is a standard of comparison. As such, it should be a principle which can be applied reliably to the specific instances under examination. Both success or failure to meet a criterion should reveal evidence pertinent to the question which the criterion was set up to examine. Criteria are designed for making decisions which are ratio-

¹³⁹ See Horbury, 2003:16, where he discusses the idea of Israel’s God presiding over a group of divine spirits or ‘gods’. If such ideas were widespread in second Temple Judaism, the direct adoption of hellenistic ideas into early Christianity proposed by Smith seems unnecessary.

¹⁴⁰ E.g. see the works of Käsemann, Bultmann, Bornkamm, Perrin, Jeremias, etc.

¹⁴¹ Meier calls criteria the “rules of the road,” see Meier, 1994:6.

nal and reliable as well as transparent. The devising of criteria thus becomes a crucial process: they have to be specific enough to be useful, yet nuanced enough to relate accurately to the question under discussion.

There are some tensions between the criteria used for historical critical work on the Gospels and the questions of historicity which they are designed to address.¹⁴² The most commonly used 'criteria' are of three main types: difference, coherence, and multiple attestation. There are other variants used by individual scholars which resemble the above categories.¹⁴³ Some scholars also use secondary criteria including questions of style, but most critics would now agree that verisimilitude (or the lack of it) or narrative detail (or the lack of it) do not contribute significantly to the resolution of questions of historicity.¹⁴⁴

Criteria of 'difference' are of limited usefulness. This group of criteria is based on the assumption that pericopae which depart from both Jewish and Early Church tradition, especially if they might be considered to have embarrassing theological implications for the Early Church (e.g. Jesus' baptism by John),¹⁴⁵ are likely to be historical. This has some merit, yet it leaves open the question of how discontinuity is to be determined. For example, in recent years there have been many changes in the understanding of Jewish faith and practice at the time of Jesus which in turn have led to changes in the way that early Christian self-understanding is described.¹⁴⁶

There is also a deeper theoretical flaw here: while the probability that a saying or event is discontinuous with Jewish and early Christian tradition might be an argument in favour of its historicity, the absence of such discontinuity does not provide evidence that it is less likely to

¹⁴² E.g. see discussion on the drawbacks to the criterion of difference in Theissen, 1996:163–164; Theissen and Winter, 2002:19–171, especially p. 63, where they suggest that the portrait of Jesus created through criteria of difference could owe something to the scholarly ideal of the solitary original individual.

¹⁴³ E.g. the criterion of embarrassment (see Meier, 1991:168–171), which can be grouped with the criterion of difference.

¹⁴⁴ See comment by Kermode, 1979:116, "—no narrative can be transparent on historical fact." Latourelle suggests that questions of style such as narrative detail can be indications ('indices') of historical probability even though they are not significant enough to be classed as a fully-fledged criterion, see Latourelle, 1973:235.

¹⁴⁵ See Meier, 1991:169.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. see Sanders, 1985. Hooker suggests that in looking for difference we are dealing with "three unknowns"—first century Judaism, early Christianity and the historical Jesus. Hooker, 1971:482. See also Porter, 2000:74.

be historical.¹⁴⁷ These criteria are only relevant to positive results; a negative result simply means that the criteria are not applicable. They are not true standards of comparison at all but arguments to advocate the historical status of certain passages. Calling an argument based on difference a ‘criterion’ muddies the procedural waters and makes it more likely that a critic will put undue significance on a failure to meet this ‘criterion’.¹⁴⁸

Criteria based on the coherence of a particular passage with the known actions and words of Jesus or the designated key events of his life pose several problems. Firstly, whose conception of the life of Jesus is to be taken as normative?¹⁴⁹ There is also a theoretical fallacy here: why should words, actions and events cohere in an obvious way? This risks making the process of determining historicity into a process of homogenisation; surely similarity could just as easily be an indicator of inauthenticity?¹⁵⁰ Such criteria of coherence are flawed because they are impossible to use with clarity. The nature of the coherence of the words and actions of Jesus remains disputed. Thus two critics may apply the same criterion of coherence to the same passage and come

¹⁴⁷ See Theissen’s revision of this criterion, bringing it into a dialectical relationship with aspects of the recorded words and actions of Jesus which were in continuity with Jewish and Christian tradition, Theissen, 1996:153; Theissen and Winter, 2002:172–212. See also Riches, 1980:49–61.

¹⁴⁸ For instance, Meier comments that: “The criterion of discontinuity focuses on words or deeds of Jesus that cannot be derived either from the Judaism(s) of Jesus’ time or from the early church.” (Meier, 1994:5) This statement, with the use of ‘focuses on’ implies a recognition that this criterion is only relevant to material with the appropriate characteristics. However, when Meier comes to assess the historicity of the Markan and Johannine accounts of walking on the water, he uses the criterion of discontinuity negatively: “The criteria of discontinuity and coherence, used in tandem, tell against historicity.” (Meier, 1994:920). Yet this judgement does not provide any evidence that the story is not historical. Note Hooker’s comment that this criterion should be used, “—in a positive way, to increase our confidence about a saying, and not in a negative way, to blackball one.” (Hooker, 1971:486).

¹⁴⁹ Meier’s plan to use this criterion “—only after a certain amount of historical material has been isolated by the previous criteria,” does not answer this objection. (See Meier, 1991:176). A decision about the essential characteristics of a collection of the actions and words of Jesus is still a triumph of abstraction over complexity, in which the perception of a particular overarching theme (e.g. the Kingdom of God) is transformed into the yardstick for authenticity. Also consider this comment by Hooker: “If the core of material upon which we build our reconstruction of the teaching of Jesus is inaccurate, then the addition of material which seems to be consistent with that core is likely to reflect those same inaccuracies.” Hooker, 1971:483.

¹⁵⁰ For instance, many scholars conclude that the feeding of the 4000 is merely a variant tradition of the feeding of the 5000 on just this basis. See discussion in Guelich, 1989:401.

up with diametrically opposite results, as is the case when Latourelle and Meier discuss walking on the water. Latourelle considers this passage to be coherent with the ministry of Jesus because,

—it comes at the time when Jesus is shifting from the preaching of the kingdom of heaven to the key question of his own *identity*. [*italics his*].¹⁵¹

Latourelle is claiming that he knows that Jesus plans to convey his true identity through the action of walking on the water. He also assumes that the Gospels are telling the story of Jesus' ministry in the order in which it happened. If one gives any credence to the form critical concept of a pericope as a separate unit of tradition, then this is an indefensible claim.¹⁵² At the very least, such an argument would need to contain an overt defence of Markan chronology as historical, but Latourelle leaves such issues undiscussed.

Meier considers that walking on the water does not cohere with the other miracles of Jesus because it is not about helping someone in dire need and it does not have an 'other-centred' or healing purpose. Instead, he implies that this miracle focuses on Jesus' status and even his self-glorification.¹⁵³ Such a pejorative judgement of walking on the water can only come from a particular view of what constitutes the essence of Jesus' other miracles. What if one characterized the healings and the exorcisms as signs of divine power and glory rather than as 'other-centred' and therapeutic? Such an interpretation is not impossible on the basis of the limited commentary on the miracles in Matthew's Gospel (e.g. Mt. 9:8, 33–34; 11:21–23; 12:28) and walking on the water would be entirely coherent with a revelatory purpose of this type.

The criterion of multiple attestation is more straightforward than the other 'criteria'. It states that an action, event or saying which is reported in several independent sources can be argued to have a claim to historicity. This criterion is at least easy to apply: the critic simply counts the sources. There may be issues over the status and nature of the sources, however. Critical decisions as to whether John is independent of the Synoptics, or whether Q existed will also affect

¹⁵¹ Latourelle, 1988:145.

¹⁵² Cf. Bornkamm's general point that form critical work, "—put an end to the fiction... that it would eventually be possible to distil from the Gospels a so-called life of Jesus, free from... the faith of the Church." Bornkamm, 1963:52.

¹⁵³ See Meier, 1994:920.

the potential number and importance of the independent sources in which parallel accounts occur.¹⁵⁴ There is also the question of the status of non-canonical sources such as the Gospel of Thomas, and whether these are judged to be early or late, reliable or eccentric.¹⁵⁵ ‘Multiple’ here means two, three, four or possibly more sources, the independence or interconnectedness of which are not entirely clear. This criterion, like the criterion of difference, is also lop-sided in the evidence it gives: it can be argued that multiple attestations strengthen the case for historicity, but it does not follow that a single attestation signifies that an event is not historical.¹⁵⁶

Sadly, this discussion of the shortcomings of the commonly used criteria for historicity is not a prelude to the presentation of new and better ones. Given the nature of New Testament sources, making a case for or against a link between a particular passage and an historical event will have to be argued on these kinds of issues.¹⁵⁷ My objection is to the use of the term ‘criteria’ at all, as if the process were quasi-scientific and as if the results obtained have something of the decisive value of evidence rather than simply the possible merit of logical argument.¹⁵⁸ A critic working at this deeper level of historical investigation is much more like a barrister presenting a case than a chemist applying forensic

¹⁵⁴ See Allison, 1998:31; “It should trouble us that none of our speculative tradition histories can ever be falsified. One can put together the myriad pieces of the Synoptic puzzle in just about any order.”

¹⁵⁵ E.g. Crossan’s assessment that the first version on the Gospel of Thomas, the Egerton Gospel, the Gospel of the Hebrews, and the ‘Cross Gospel’ (a source for the Gospel of Peter), etc. all belong to the earliest strata of Christian tradition. See Crossan, 1991:427–428.

¹⁵⁶ Pace Theissen and Merz, 1998:115—“The criterion of multiple attestation cannot be criticized.”

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Theissen’s modification of traditionally used criteria, which still looks at issues of difference and coherence, even if in a more inventive way; see Theissen, 1996:151–154; Theissen and Winter, 2002:172–225. Also Porter’s proposals for three new criteria: (1) Jesus’ use of Greek, (2) ‘Greek textual variance’ and (3) ‘discourse features’, in which he still discusses multiple attestation and difference in making decisions (e.g. Porter, 2000:159–164) and could be argued to be offering refinements of these traditional criteria in his proposals (2) and (3). His determination to work with the detail of the Greek text rather than speculate on the history of the traditions is refreshing but leads to the occasional glaring *non sequitur* such as the assertion that identifying Mark 13 as pre-Markan “—would point to this discourse being possibly authentic Jesus tradition,” Porter, 2000:235. It remains to be seen whether his proposals prompt a new direction in the development of criteria.

¹⁵⁸ “So we have to wonder, in times of candid reflection, to what extent our arguments are rationalizations of previously formed impressions.” Allison, 1998:76.

tests to a sample.¹⁵⁹ The resulting argument, however detailed and rigorous, does not offer proof, but simply an educated guess or a persuasive apologetic; sometimes that educated guess contains more logical fallacies and is shaped by more inarticulate prejudice and preference than the critic would care to admit.¹⁶⁰ Much scholarly energy goes into trying to understand the first century context,¹⁶¹ while often little attention is paid to understanding the heritage of our own particular twenty-first century context and the way that it shapes our investigations.¹⁶² Only dialogue with interpreters from different times and places can begin to mitigate this cultural myopia. Procedural rigour alone will not do it, since the design and the execution of the procedure itself is subject to our own cultural expectations.¹⁶³

Historical questions such as whether Jesus did walk on the water remain important. Unfortunately, the significance of the questions does not guarantee the quality of the answers which can be given. The more mundane yet responsible path is to affirm with Davies and Allison,

¹⁵⁹ Allison suggests that work to uncover the historical Jesus is not like science or mathematics; “—we will never be able to program a computer with perfected criteria of authenticity, run the Jesus tradition through it, and learn what Jesus did or did not say.” Allison, 1998:35.

¹⁶⁰ As early as 1956, Bornkamm made the point that previous lives of Jesus were affected by each author bringing “—the spirit of his own age into his presentation of the figure of Jesus,” yet he was motivated by the hope that critical vigilance could overcome this. See Bornkamm, 1960:13. It seems that this hope springs eternal; see the comment by Meier, “There is no neutral Switzerland of the mind in the world of Jesus research,” Meier, 1991:5, yet he, too, believes that this limitation can be overcome. Meier’s main concern is what he sees as the personal beliefs of the scholar, however, not the wider cultural assumptions which shape the very construction of the method. For instance, despite his attempts at objectivity, the composition of Meier’s imaginary conclave points to the limits of his own cultural frame of reference: he has a Protestant, a Catholic, a Jew and an agnostic—no Orthodox and no Muslim, nor any comment on the ethnicity, gender or economic status of the participants. See Meier, 1991:1.

¹⁶¹ E.g. Meier’s extensive chapter on ‘Miracles and Ancient Minds’, see Meier, 1994:535–616.

¹⁶² See Carleton Paget, 2001:149 on how contributors to the Jesus debate have used their accounts to further a particular cause or idea. See also Bockmuehl, 1998:282, “They [historical critics] assume that they may therefore continue to operate more or less in splendid isolation from considerations of Christian theology, or indeed from an understanding of the wider cultural and philosophical context in which their own work is carried out.”

¹⁶³ Pace Meier, 1994:632, n. 2, where he suggests that historical-critical criteria help create a level playing field of scholarly investigation.

As historians we know of no criterion by which to resolve the riddle. Perhaps it is wisest to confess that the truth lies indiscoverably hidden beneath the texts.¹⁶⁴

There do not seem to be any decisive grounds on which one could say that the Gospel accounts of walking on the water do or do not relate to an actual historical event.

Given the intractable nature of these kinds of historical questions, it is interesting that so much scholarly energy is devoted to arguing the case for one possibility over another. In broader terms, perhaps the quest for the historical Jesus is as much for credibility as it is for historicity. Is part of the aim to demonstrate that certain views can be defended within the traditional terms of this debate?¹⁶⁵ Or that the debate itself can be made acceptable to a wider academic and public audience?¹⁶⁶

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This historical critical examination of Mt 14:22–33 has delivered few assured results and leaves many questions open. If the independence of John is accepted, it seems highly likely that the Markan and Johannine pericopae come from pre-Gospel sources which already linked walking on the water with the feeding of the five thousand. This militates against the suggestion that this pericope is a misplaced resurrection account. The combined witness of Mark and John against the additional Matthean episode of Peter walking on the water raises doubts that it was part of the earliest tradition. It is much more likely to be a Matthean redaction. The question of sources remains open, although there is much stronger evidence for a hellenistic background to this story than either a direct Old Testament or Buddhist source. The cultural and theological influence of a ‘divine man’ concept on this story is likely

¹⁶⁴ Davies and Allison, 1991:499–500.

¹⁶⁵ See Latourelle’s almost Johannine (‘these things are written so that you may come to believe’) affirmation, “C’est par l’usage de ce critère [d’explication nécessaire] que nous établissons, en théologie fondamentale, le fait de la résurrection de Jésus, le fait de la primauté de Pierre, le fait de la conscience messianique et de la divinité de Jésus.” Latourelle, 1973:239.

¹⁶⁶ For instance, the very concept of Meier’s imaginary conclave is about consensus results which would be acceptable both inside and outside the Christian church. See Meier, 1991:1.

to be minimal. It is impossible to establish historically whether these pericopae narrate an event which actually did or did not happen.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES RAISED

Interestingly, the approach of many scholars to the interpretation of this story seems to be governed by the theological and christological commitments which they bring to it.¹⁶⁷ Consider the contrary assessments of Latourelle and Meier as to whether Jesus would be likely to walk on the water.

Latourelle asserts that this is exactly the kind of action Jesus would do to reveal his true identity. The implication is that the identity of Jesus can best be revealed by a miracle because it involves elements of the divine; therefore Latourelle has a high christology which is at home with the thought that this story is essentially an epiphany. He sees no obstacle to the idea that Jesus would use a miracle for a self-revelatory purpose. Meier, on the other hand, is sure that Jesus would not have walked on the water to reveal something about himself, because such an action would be self-glorification. In Meier's view, the only justification for a miracle is that it be therapeutic and 'other-centred'. Interestingly, Meier still understands the story as expressing a high christology, but he sees this as the Christology of the Early Church, not the self-communication of Jesus.

On the issue of sources, too, there are some sharp disagreements. Heil works hard to establish an Old Testament background for the story. In doing this, he implies that these pericopae communicate a very high christology, because Jesus is doing an action previously performed only by YHWH. Davies and Allison follow this line closely, making frequent references to Heil's work and specifically refuting any link to ideas of a 'divine man'.¹⁶⁸ The high christology on the part of the Early Church which is inferred from an Old Testament origin for the story is in direct contrast to the type of evaluation made by scholars who assert that the accounts have a pagan origin. If the story came from a Buddhist myth then it is a misappropriated religious tradition, simply transferring the

¹⁶⁷ See Theissen and Winter, 2002:10, "—in the background of Jesus research there always stands particular theological or christological concepts."

¹⁶⁸ See Davies and Allison, 1991:510.

skill of the Buddha to Jesus. If it was developed to fulfill the expectations of followers of a 'divine man', then Jesus becomes the focus for a type of hellenistic cult, displaying only the same qualities as many others of his time.

There is another area that evokes strong responses from some critics—the actions of Peter. Tasker's stubborn adoption of the ἐλθεῖν reading in verse 29 and his idiosyncratic translation of περιπάτησεν have already been commented upon.¹⁶⁹ He appears to be determined to prevent Peter from sharing in this miracle even for a moment. Garland is another critic who takes a great exception to Peter's involvement and asserts that Peter should never have left the boat, since the boat is the symbol of the church, the place where all good disciples belong.¹⁷⁰ Is this hostility to a perceived position of privilege for Peter, or a particular view of the glory of Jesus which means that it could never be shared in any way by his disciple?

Some scholars interpret the story allegorically. This downplays the importance of the miracle or miracles, and puts the stress on the situation which the disciples find themselves in. The waves are a symbol of persecution and danger, the boat is the Church and Peter is the archetypal disciple who doubts in the face of persecution. In effect, the occasion for the story is completely altered: it is not a pre-crucifixion event, but a post-resurrection, pre-Parousia time of trial. The story is an allegory about a widely experienced situation, much more than it is a specific account about Jesus. Surprisingly, advocates of this approach are not solely the patristic or medieval commentators whom one might expect; it is a common mid-twentieth century way of making sense of this story.¹⁷¹

My conclusion is that none of the sharply expressed views outlined here is based on historical evidence alone, but on different understandings of who Jesus was, who Peter was in relation to him, and how likely it is that miraculous events of this type would actually happen. These understandings are inevitably influenced by the theological and philosophical traditions within which these different critics live. Do these influences make their work invalid? Are they discredited by their own partiality? One common way of critiquing another scholar's work

¹⁶⁹ See Tasker, 1961:145.

¹⁷⁰ See Garland, 1993:158.

¹⁷¹ E.g. see Fenton, 1963:244, Gundry, 1982:300.

is to intimate that their preconceptions show in their results and that therefore their conclusions are not the result of a rational, impartial and rigorous enquiry. Yet Gadamer's concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* includes the idea that we are all the children of tradition, we are all 'partial' interpreters (in both senses of the word). Does this mean that all historical critical work is discredited? Is the enlightenment ideal of rational enquiry shown to have been a mythical goal?

The most extreme postmodern view is that the discovery of the ubiquitous nature of preconceptions undermines the enterprise of rational enquiry entirely, indeed, it undermines any coherent account of reality. Yet this conclusion is strangely reminiscent of the enlightenment ideals it seeks to undermine: enlightenment thinkers presented rational, impartial enquiry as the path to all knowledge, postmodern thinkers have pointed out that that enquiry is not impartial and have concluded that it is the path to oblivion and that knowledge is impossible. The extremes of 'all knowledge' and 'no knowledge' are simply two sides of the same coin, both based on the tacit assumption that rational enquiry as framed by enlightenment ideals is the only path one can travel, for good or ill. What if there was another path, a path of rational enquiry consciously informed by tradition?

In this case, the criticism of the scholars discussed above would not be that they operate with preconceptions, but that they operate with *unexamined* preconceptions. More than this, they operate within an artificial concept of enquiry which suggests that a proper investigation can and does proceed without preconceptions. Since this is not the case, the enquiry itself has to be framed in such a way that it perpetuates the myth, excluding the types of questions which would expose either the interpreter's bias or inadequacy, thus giving the lie to "—the absolute self-construction of reason, (*der Idee einer absoluten Selbstkonstruktion der Vernunft*)."¹⁷² As Gadamer expresses it:

Someone who is open to tradition in this way sees that historical consciousness is not really open at all, but rather, when it reads its texts "historically," it has always thoroughly smoothed them out beforehand, so that the criteria of the historian's own knowledge can never be called into question by tradition.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Gadamer, 1989:277 (Gadamer, 1975:261).

¹⁷³ Gadamer, 1989:361 (Gadamer, 1975:344).

This criticism does not undermine the logical, rational weighing of evidence to reach interpretative decisions, it only suggests that an element is missing—the consideration of tradition—both to supplement and critique the interpretation. The lack of this consideration of tradition (or *Wirkungsgeschichte*) does not mean that it is not present within the interpretation, but that it works unseen and therefore unchecked and unexamined.

The fact that the scholars discussed in this chapter work in accordance with their deeply held views about the world is not a reason for disregarding their work, but a stimulus to find a way to examine their claims more deeply. The literary examination which follows will provide a different perspective on the detail of the text, giving a new way of assessing the textual evidence for some of these interpretative choices. Examining some ‘effects’ of Mt 14:22–33 which developed in different contexts will also aid this process. These ‘effects’ will offer some new perspectives on the issues under discussion. They may suggest critical alternatives which are new to our twenty-first century context, or they may enable us to reflect more deeply on the critical heritage which gave rise to the approaches outlined here.

CHAPTER THREE

A LITERARY CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF MT 14:22–33

INTRODUCTION

There have been a number of recent studies of Matthew using a variety of literary techniques to analyse the Gospel text.¹ Kingsbury, for instance, bases much of his approach on Chatman's theory of narrative structure,² and so divides 'story' (what happens) from 'discourse' (the way the story is told).³ He also uses the categories of 'implied author', 'implied reader' and 'narrator' to analyse aspects of the way the story is constructed. These categories, which are also part of the vocabulary of reader-response criticism, are designed to describe the way in which a particular narrative functions. They focus on the structures which guide a reader into certain attitudes and expectations, such as the role of the narrator in relation to the characters. They attempt to uncover previously unexamined aspects of the relationship between the reader and the text in a way that resembles three-dimensional co-ordinates: they tightly plot the dividing line between the world of the text and the actual world by making a distinction between the real author or reader in the outside world and the implied author or reader within the text.⁴

¹ E.g. Anderson, 1994; Carter, 1997; Edwards, 1985; Howell, 1990; Kingsbury, 1984, 1988a, etc.; Philips, 1985; Powell, 1996, etc.

² See Chatman, 1978:19.

³ These categories are derived from the Russian formalist terms, *fabula* and *sjuzet*. See Lodge, 1992:61.

⁴ Chatman illustrates these distinctions with the use of a diagram, underlining the precision of the scheme, see Chatman, 1978:151. But there are occasions when narrative critics use figures such as 'the implied reader' to claim unwarranted authority for their interpretations, see Ashton's criticisms, Ashton, 1994:160, "Real readers, too, or any who are ready to sip the enchanted potion held invitingly towards them, are liable to be bewitched by this clever rhetoric. But what Staley calls the implied reader of the Gospel is really a surrogate exegete, and those who manage to pierce his clever disguise will continue to respond critically to every stage of the presentation." See Suleiman, 1980:10, "—the implied author and the implied reader are interpretive constructs and, as such, participate in the circularity of all interpretation." However, also see Kingsbury's nuanced and sensitive use of 'the implied reader' to carefully

This interest in structures means that narrative and reader-response critics tend to work on whole Gospel texts, rather than on individual pericopae.⁵ When they do focus on a particular episode, they tend to be more interested in how it functions within the whole Gospel than on the smaller stylistic features of the particular pericope.⁶ A close examination of this sort was the focus of an earlier tradition of literary criticism,⁷ but even Chatman makes the point that it is indispensable for an overall critical appreciation of a particular text.⁸ For this reason, it seems helpful when studying a short passage to combine some of the insights of narrative theory with a more traditional close literary reading of the text. For instance, this study will include the examination of repetitions and sentence structure, as well as the role of the narrator. The following examination of Mt 14:22–33, then, is intended to highlight certain significant literary features, rather than to analyze the story according to a single rigid scheme.⁹

In fact, to use any metacritical theory on the nature of narrative as if

define what cannot be known about the identity of ‘the Pharisees and the Sadducees’, Kingsbury, 1988b:448–451.

⁵ E.g. see Rhoads and Mitchie, 1982; Kingsbury, 1988a; Bauer, 1988; Howell, 1990, etc. Literary critics would no doubt defend this ‘whole Gospel’ approach as an antidote to the many historical critical studies focussed on a single pericope.

⁶ E.g. see Weaver, 1990. Although this monograph is specifically about Matthew’s Missionary Discourse, a close examination of Mt 9:35–11.1 (Ch. 3, pp. 71–126) is sandwiched between an examination of Mt 1:1–9:34, (Ch. 2, pp. 31–70) and an examination of Mt 11.2–28:20, (Ch. 4, pp. 127–154); suggesting that it is the place of the discourse within the whole Gospel which interests her. See also Anderson, 1994; which, although it focusses on repetitions within Matthew’s Gospel, looks at the repetitions which link different pericopae into an overall ‘narrative web’, rather than on the rhetorical use of repetitions within a particular episode.

⁷ In the UK, particularly the tradition of Leavisite Criticism, associated with close reading, practical criticism and the resistance against using abstract theory as the foundation for a critical approach. See Newton, 1992a:9–10. This contrasts sharply with the formalist roots of theories like Chatman’s, as formalism aimed to ‘establish the study of literature on a scientific basis,’ see Newton, 1992b:39.

⁸ See Chatman, 1978:118, “As a stylistician, I would be the last to suggest that the interesting configurations of the medium, the words that manifest the character in the verbal narrative, are therefore less worthy of study than other parts of the narrative composite.”

⁹ See Chatman’s own comment on rigid procedural categories, Chatman, 1978:166, “Narrative theory has suffered from too great a reliance on categories, so that the full discursive complexities of individual narratives are sometimes missed because they do not ‘fit’.” Also Kermode 1979:136, “—younger biblical scholars have adopted (sometimes, I think, too clinically) structuralist methods.” Also Sherwood, 2000:229, “—here in the ghetto of Biblical Studies we are still working with a mental image of text as a word-search puzzle which can be ringed and solved.”

it were a scheme of work is a misunderstanding. Chatman, for instance, describes his theory of narrative structure as a 'grid', but then speaks of locating any particular narrative on this grid, not of placing the grid on a particular narrative, as some New Testament critics seem to do.¹⁰ A metacritical theory attempts a description that will account for all the specific examples of a phenomenon by identifying its underlying structures. If such a theory is applied rigidly to a single narrative text, it can reduce the critic's field of vision to those structures common to all narratives in all media, and therefore bypass what is original and irreducible in this particular piece of writing. It will also provide many categories which do not apply to the text in question.¹¹

Ashton argues that narrative criticism, "—misconceives the true nature of the Gospels," and that, in consequence, "the results it yields are trifling, if not altogether illusory."¹² His chief complaint against narrative critics is their neglect of historical questions, particularly their refusal to consider the multiple sources of the Gospels as significant factors in the structure of these texts.¹³ There are, of course, counter-arguments that could be offered about the dissecting nature of source critical enquiries as they delve behind the text, and the speculative nature of the results of such studies.¹⁴ Such a debate rapidly degrades into a process of attack and counter-attack between literary and historical criticism. However, in purely literary terms, Ashton has a point. The fact that the Gospels were written in the context of pre-existing (and co-existing) traditions about Jesus will affect their literary texture. It will make them different from novels, dramas or short stories where the narrative originates with the author.¹⁵

¹⁰ See Chatman, 1978:19, "It [narrative theory] plots individual texts on the grid and asks whether their accommodation requires adjustment of the grid."

¹¹ E.g. discussions of Matthew's implied author and narrator. Distinctions of this type only prove significant where the potential division of implied author and narrator is brought into play, as in the case of the use of an unreliable narrator, e.g. Loos, 1998, (first published 1925).

¹² Ashton, 1994:141.

¹³ See Ashton, 1994:145–6.

¹⁴ E.g. see Anderson, 1994:26, "Narrative critics, rebelliously rejecting what they saw as disintegrating methods, began to examine the Gospels as literary wholes."

¹⁵ See E.M. Forster, writing of the nature of fictional characters, "—his creator and narrator are one." Forster, 1962:63. Present day theorists would probably say that his or her creator and implied author are one. The case is not so simple with characters in the Gospel stories. See also Evans, 1995, who discusses how the results of form and redaction criticism can reveal aspects of the literary texture of the Gospel narratives often neglected by literary critics.

Burridge's study of the genre of the Gospels in the light of Graeco-Roman βίοι suggests that there is a significant link between the Gospels and ancient biography.¹⁶ The importance of this issue for historical critical debates about the purpose and cultural milieu of the Gospels has long been recognised.¹⁷ However, its importance for text-immanent literary approaches has been neglected. To suggest that a Gospel is a type of βίος, (or to identify it as being akin to any other historical genre) is not to deny that it is a creative narrative susceptible to literary examination, but to suggest that the literary criticism of it needs to be appropriately focussed.

The genre of a text creates expectations in a reader or hearer about its content and style. An initial identification of genre is an important early step in a literary critical appreciation of a particular text. The genre offers a framework within which interpretation can then begin.¹⁸ This step is missing from many literary critical studies of the Gospels, except for the broad identification of the category of 'narrative'.¹⁹ A general critical theory about the characteristics of narrative in any and all genre and media does not offer any critical tools for identifying a more specific genre, nor for exploring its stylistic implications. This proves to be a weakness when such a theory is applied to a text without the support of other critical approaches; for, as Chatman says of his own theory,

¹⁶ See Burridge, 1992, especially p. 254, "—we may conclude that the authors of the gospels were aware of the βίος nature of their work."

¹⁷ See Burridge's discussion of the implications of Bultmann's *sui generis* position: it removed the Gospels from their first century literary context, focussed attention on the traditions behind the Gospels instead of on the Gospels themselves and effectively eclipsed the authors; see Burridge, 1992:11–13. Such an approach reinforces the primacy of the concept of *kerygma* as the source of Christian tradition, which has far-reaching historical and theological implications.

¹⁸ See Wellek and Warren, 1963:231, "Genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific metre or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose)." See Gadamer on the related question of recognising a particular style, "Style belongs, in fact, to the fundamental bases of art; it is one of its inevitable conditions." Gadamer, 1989:496. See also Burridge, 1992:55, "—genre is a crucial tool for the study and interpretation of a text in that it provides a form of contract between author and reader, giving a set of expectations for both composition and interpretation."

¹⁹ E.g. Kingsbury, 1988a; Rhoads and Mitchie, 1982. These influential studies pre-date Burridge's work, but they do not mention earlier attempts to classify the genre of the Gospels, e.g. Talbert, 1977; Shuler, 1982; nor do they lament the lack of a clear genre identification, nor even discuss the issue. Anderson, 1994:144, n. 4, specifically dissociates herself from the issue, "By plot type, I do not mean a historically specific genre such as Hellenistic biography."

It is not concerned with the evaluation or description of any particular literary work for its own sake.²⁰

Narrative expressed in, for instance, the genre of βίος, will have its own particular qualities. A detailed review of the characteristics and variations of this genre would be needed in order to assess whether its potential is realised and developed within a particular Gospel. Such a review is beyond the scope of this study, but would enhance the literary criticism of the Gospels. The neglect of the issue of genre leads to the neglect of some crucial literary critical issues.

Matthew is not writing his Gospel in isolation, but within an emerging Christian tradition. He writes using earlier versions of the story of Jesus and he may be writing for an audience which is familiar with Mark's Gospel.²¹ The knowledge that this is not the only depiction of these characters and events will affect the evangelist's method. It both limits his approach (he is constrained by the tradition) and opens a new dimension of communication with the reader (the evangelist can interact with the tradition by reshaping it). We cannot be sure, then, what level of prior knowledge Matthew may expect his audience to have and so to what extent subtle changes in the story are intended to strike a pointed contrast with earlier versions. This issue of wider tradition highlights the inadequacy of some critical tools designed for the analysis of novels and films to describe the literary texture of the Gospels.

E.M. Forster's categorization of characters as either 'flat' or 'round' is perhaps not the most helpful for describing characters within Gospel stories.²² The Gospels have particular ingredients in their portrayal of

²⁰ Chatman, 1978:18. See also David Lodge's comments on the aims of the exponents of narratology, "—their aim is not the explication of texts but the uncovering of the system that allows narrative texts to be generated and competent readers to make sense of them." Lodge, 1992:60.

²¹ See Stanton, 1992:76, "In other words, for most of the first recipients, Matthew's Gospel was an extended commentary on what the original readers and listeners already knew. Hence the story-line and the plot contained few surprises." Also consider passages such as 27:53, when Matthew mentions the resurrection immediately after Jesus has died, before he has been taken down from the cross. This might suggest that Matthew expects his readers to know the end of the story, and so feels free to make this excursus into discussing the appearance of saints in Jerusalem. If the implied readers were 'first time' readers, mentioning the resurrection in such a low key way at this point would be extremely puzzling and would rob the story of its impact.

²² Not least because these terms describe characters in novels, which are often marked by descriptions of the characters' inner lives, see Forster, 1962:53; and by stories of 'a certain extent... the extent should not be less than 50 000 words,' see Forster, 1962:13.

some characters which are obscured by such a binary division. For instance, given the choice between ‘flat’ and ‘round’ both Kingsbury and Powell describe the disciples as ‘round’, in that they show more than one character trait, and their words and actions are capable of complex interpretation.²³ This is surely true, as far as it goes, but such a definition does not lead us much closer to understanding the portrayal of the disciples. If they are ‘round’, they are a ‘round chorus’: characters with more than one characteristic, yet who most often speak with one choral voice,²⁴ a category not considered in Forster’s original scheme, where the chorus would normally be ‘flat’, often as a foil to the ‘round’ main characters.²⁵ Other approaches will be needed to delineate the way that the collective character ‘the disciples’ is portrayed. In the study which follows, the characters are examined through their names, their actions and their direct speech.

Literary studies of the gospels can also be hampered by the uncritical use of theological categories. Kingsbury, for instance, in his 1984 article, ‘The figure of Jesus in Matthew’s story: a literary-critical probe,’ begins by saying;

The question of the Christology of Matthew’s Gospel continues to spark debate.²⁶

He does not go on to define ‘Christology’, nor to discuss how this abstract theological category, with its confessional implications, relates to the telling of this story. He seems to accept as axiomatic that Matthew’s Christology is contained within the titles given to Jesus, and proceeds to defend “Son of God” as Matthew’s primary christological title; a task which he could have done without using narrative critical tools. He does not discuss the way in which these titles are spoken within a narrative ‘world’: they are spoken by a character to a character or characters, within a particular setting, within a particular sequence of

Note Burridge’s identification of Graeco-Roman βίος as between 5000 and 25000 words in length, which fits much more closely with Matthew’s approx. 18000 words, see Burridge, 1992:177.

²³ See Kingsbury, 1988a:13; Powell, 1996:169.

²⁴ E.g. see 8:25, 13:10, 13:36, 14:15, 15:12, 15:23, 15:33, 17:19, etc.

²⁵ See Forster, 1962:76. See also Wellek and Warren, 1963:219, “‘Round characterization, like ‘dynamic’, requires space and emphasis; is obviously usable for characters focal for point of view or interest; hence is ordinarily combined with ‘flat’ treatment of background figures—the ‘chorus’.”

²⁶ Kingsbury, 1984:3.

the plot. Kingsbury does not consider whether it is within these interactions between characters that Matthew's understanding of who Jesus is actually emerges.²⁷ Hill criticizes Kingsbury's article because,

—a literary-critical reading of a narrative has an undeniably subjective element to it,²⁸

but a more relevant criticism would be that this study is not 'literary' enough; Kingsbury has not allowed the distinctives of a literary perspective to modify his theological method.

In conclusion, recent literary studies of the gospels have revealed the pitfalls as well as the benefits of literary analysis. It is important not to submit a text to 'waffle-iron' criticism, searing it with the lines of rigid categories, regardless of its actual shape and qualities. Avoiding this will mean the careful examination of particular literary features, rather than following a set critical scheme. It is important not to treat a Gospel as if it were a novel, because of its special position within a pre-existing tradition. It is also important to allow literary insights to enter into critical dialogue with both theological and historical assumptions so that our total understanding of the Gospel texts is enriched rather than simply re-packaged.²⁹ With these caveats in mind, what follows is a discussion of Mt 14:22–33 using the narrative critical ideas of the role of the narrator, the importance of the perceptual point of view and the nature of narrated time within the story; this is combined with an examination of Matthew's style in terms of the repetitions he uses and the ways in which the characters are developed.

²⁷ Note L.E. Keck's comments on uncovering the significance of Jesus' sayings, "The Evangelists often provided the settings for Jesus' sayings, not simply because they wanted to create a more vivid narrative but also because they sensed that the sayings' impact is enhanced if one encounters them as Jesus' particular response in a particular situation rather than as disembodied teaching." Keck, 2000:160. See also this related theoretical point—Iser, 1980:113, "As a rule, there are four main perspectives in narration: those of the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader. Although these may differ in order of importance, none of them on its own is identical to the meaning of the text, which is to be brought about by their constant intertwining."

²⁸ Hill, 1984:38.

²⁹ E.g. see Moore, 1989:107, on the self-imposed limits of biblical reader-response criticism, "—reader-orientated exegeses can often read disappointingly like the familiar critical renditions of the given biblical passage, lightly reclothed in a reader vocabulary."

NARRATION

The narrator of the Gospel makes few overt comments³⁰ in this passage. Most of the characters' thoughts and feelings are not explicitly narrated to us in a comment or an explanation. The exceptions are the feelings of the disciples in verse 26: ἐταράχθησαν...καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου ἔκραξαν and Peter's feelings in verse 30: βλέπων δὲ τὸν ἄνεμον ἐφοβήθη. It is typical of Matthew's narrator that these overt comments are few and that generally the characters' feelings and motivations must be inferred from what is said and done. The significance of what the characters say and do is also left unspoken. This is a logical characteristic of a Gospel which conveys so much of Jesus' teaching in direct speech without a narrator's overt intervention at all.³¹

In fact, the Gospels all tend towards a covert narrator,³² which could arise from the desire to preserve earlier 'sayings' traditions: the intention being to allow Jesus' traditional words to stand relatively free of narrated explanation. Yet there is a difference of degree between the style of the different Gospels.³³ This can be illustrated by an examination of the pericope of the healing of the man with the withered hand. In Mark 3:5, the narrator attributes both a judgment (the Pharisees are hard of heart) and feelings (anger and grief) to Jesus: περιβλεψάμενος αὐτοὺς μετ' ὀργῆς συλλυπούμενος ἐπὶ τῇ πωρώσει τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν. Luke's narrator comments that Jesus "knew what was in their minds," αὐτὸς δὲ ᾔδει τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς αὐτῶν (Luke 6:8) and, like Mark's narrator, comments that Jesus looked around at them all (Luke 6:10) but does not mention Jesus' thoughts or feelings on doing so. Matthew's version of the story is told almost entirely in direct speech: the Pharisees ask their question directly, εἰ ἔξεστιν τοῖς σάββασιν θεραπεῦσαι; (Mt 12:10). This is followed by the narrator's only comment: the Pharisees want to bring a charge against Jesus. Jesus' reply is extended by a short parable

³⁰ See Chatman, 1978:146–7. Also, contrast the narrator of Matthew's Gospel with the narrator used in some novels, e.g. this extract from Anthony Trollope's *Doctor Thorne*, "Before the reader is introduced to the modest country medical practitioner who is to be the chief personage of the following tale, it will be well that he should be made acquainted with some particulars as to the locality in which, and the neighbours among whom, our doctor followed his profession." Trollope, 1980:1; first published 1858.

³¹ See 5:1–7:29, 10:5–11:1 etc.

³² See Chatman, 1978:197–218.

³³ John's Gospel has the most overt narrator, see 1:20, 4:6, 4:44, 6:6, 7:1, 19:28, 21:24–25.

which gives his answer to their question and also conveys his judgment on their hypocritical attitude, ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τίς ἔσται ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἔξει πρόβατον ἐν καὶ ἐὰν ἐμπέσῃ τοῦτο τοῖς σάββασιν εἰς βόθυνον, οὐχὶ κρατήσῃ αὐτὸ καὶ ἐγερεῖ; (Mt 12:11). This short example illustrates an aspect of Matthew's style: his Gospel contains more direct speech and fewer narrated observations and explanations than the other Gospels.³⁴

This sparsity of narrator comment has a direct bearing on the interpretation of Mt 14:22–33. It is what gives this story a measure of mystery and ambiguity. Actions are described without explanation; Jesus makes his disciples go on ahead of him, and then, between three and six in the morning, he comes walking on the sea. The reader has to guess both Jesus' motivation for acting in this way and what significance to give these actions in the narrative of the whole gospel. (The disciples' confession in verse 33 does not completely settle this issue of significance, since the reader is still left to surmise both what exactly prompts the confession and what is meant by it). The same issue of motivation arises concerning the actions of Peter: why does he want to walk on the water? The narrator offers no comments to direct our interpretation.³⁵ The lack of overt guidance from the narrator throws the actions done and the words spoken into sharp relief; they must be our guides.³⁶ The setting and the scenery also take on a new prominence.

Setting, perceptual viewpoint and narrative space

The narrative space³⁷ of this episode is special among Gospel stories. Jesus and the disciples are in different places and yet the story follows both centres of action—Jesus praying on the hill and the disciples rowing

³⁴ E.g. see the differences in the account of the transfiguration, Mk 9:6; Lk 9:32–33; Mt. 17:1–8.

³⁵ All three Gospel accounts of Jesus walking on the water are light on narrator comment, but Matthew is even lighter than Mark or John. See Mark 6:48; John 6:17, 21.

³⁶ See Powell, 1996:164, who has drawn attention to the importance of speech for interpreting Matthew's gospel.

³⁷ The 'narrative space' is the imaginary space in which a story unfolds. It is not exactly the same as 'setting', since it could be significant that a story is set in London, yet the narrative space in which that story unfolds could be the corner of only one room in London. For an interpretation of this story which uses the Galilee setting (rather than the narrative space) as *the* hermeneutical key, see Derrett, 1981:338–340.

on the lake. It is rare for the disciples and Jesus to be separated³⁸ but it is even rarer for the story not to be limited to one perceptual viewpoint.³⁹ In the garden of Gethsemane, for instance, Jesus takes Peter, James and John away from the rest of the disciples (Mt 26:36–37) and we hear no more about the wider group of disciples until they flee (Mt 26:56). He then moves away from Peter, James and John (Mt 26:39), and we hear no more about them until Jesus returns and finds them sleeping (Mt 26:40). The readers are clearly following Jesus' perceptual point of view: although the total narrative space widens across the garden, the story moves with Jesus.⁴⁰

In Mt 14:22–33, the perceptual viewpoint is not limited to that of a particular character or group of characters: for instance, there is a description of Jesus praying on the hill (14:23) followed by a description of the boat (14:24), followed by a description of Jesus' movements (14:25), followed by a description of the disciples' reactions on seeing him, (14:26). This alternating perceptual viewpoint is not essential to the telling of the story but a particular feature of Matthew's discourse.⁴¹

This use of different perceptual viewpoints emphasizes the opening up of the narrative space as Jesus and the disciples are parted, and then emphasizes the moment of encounter as the narrative space closes again when they are reunited. Closure begins at verse 25 when Jesus approaches and the disciples react to him, but does not take place fully until verse 32, when Jesus and Peter enter the boat. Although there is a moment of fearful encounter which resembles resurrection appearances,⁴² this narrative differs from them precisely in the aspect of the changing perceptual viewpoint: the readers know where Jesus has come from, whereas in the resurrection narratives this viewpoint

³⁸ E.g. note Mt 9:23–25, where it is not mentioned that Jesus leaves most of the disciples outside—compare with Mk 5:37 and Lk 8:51. Only in Mt 10:5–10, is there a separation for mission; and even this is accomplished with a short summary, see 11:1. For separations from some of his disciples, see also 17:24–25, 20:20–23, 21:1–2; but it is not until 26:39 that Jesus is parted from all of his disciples, except in this episode of walking on the water.

³⁹ The other occurrence of this narrative technique is in the Passion narrative when the perceptual viewpoint moves successively from Peter to Jesus, back to Peter and then to Judas. See Mt 26:58–27:5.

⁴⁰ This is true of other examples, e.g. in Mt 17:1–8, the story is told from the disciples' point of view.

⁴¹ E.g. see John 6:16–21, which is a sea-walking story told only from the disciples' perceptual viewpoint.

⁴² E.g. Lk 24:37.

remains hidden.⁴³ Jesus is both the familiar figure just come down from the mountainside where he was earlier, and the unfamiliar being, doing what no ordinary person can do; or, at least, has not done until now.

The sense that the narrative space has opened out is accentuated by the descriptions of time and place, elements of setting which are often left undetermined in Gospel stories.⁴⁴ The hill (or mountain), the boat, the waves and the wind are all integral to this narrative and give a sense of a story taking place within a landscape. The events of this story obviously require the functional setting of the water and the boat in order to make sense; but, as many commentators have suggested,⁴⁵ the references to the natural setting extend beyond this functional minimum and so could take on a symbolic value.⁴⁶ Evaluating these interpretations of the boat or the waves or the mountain is difficult, precisely because of the economy of the narrative and the lack of comments from the narrator.

Perhaps the repetition of 'the mountain' throughout Matthew's Gospel points to a symbolic meaning here. τὸ ὄρος occurs eight times in Matthew, (4:8, 5:1, 14:23, 15:29, 17:1, 21:1, 26:30, 28:16). five of these eight times seem to be significant within the plot; τὸ ὄρος is the setting in which Jesus teaches and heals (5:1, 15:29)⁴⁷ it is also a place of revelation (17:1) and the place where Jesus makes vital choices about his ministry (4:8). It is the setting for the closing words of the Gospel, when Jesus speaks of his power and authority and commissions his disciples, (28:16). In this last pericope, particular attention is drawn to the mountain, because it is the place that Jesus has commanded his disciples to meet him. Matthew's narrative has come full circle, from the first detailed presentation of teaching (5:1) to the command-

⁴³ E.g. see John's story of Jesus on the shore, especially Jn 21:4.

⁴⁴ E.g. Mt 9:2–8, it does not seem to matter to Matthew's narrator whether this healing happens indoors or out; times of day are rarely mentioned, e.g. Mt 9:18f., other events are given a general location, e.g. sea of Galilee (4:18f), a mountain (5:1), but with no time of day. The exceptions are the passion and resurrection narratives, where times and places are much more clearly specified, e.g. 26:34, 27:1, 27:45, 27:57, 28:1.

⁴⁵ E.g. see Schweizer, 1976:210, on boat as community; see Gundry, 1982:298 on the waves and water being symbols of persecution; Davies and Allison, 1991:502 comment on 'the mountain' as being redundant in the story and therefore typological of Moses.

⁴⁶ See Chatman, quoting Robert Lindell's categories of natural scenery, Chatman, 1978:143.

⁴⁷ He also "sits down", καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ (5:1), ἐκάθητο ἐκεῖ (15:29) a position of authority. In 5:2 he also opens his mouth, καὶ ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ, a formal semitic opening to the speech.

ment to make disciples and teach them to obey everything that Jesus commanded (28:20).

The three other references, however, (14:23, 21:1, 26:30) seem to be more incidental geographical details; almost as soon as τὸ ὄρος is mentioned, the events of the story move on to a different setting—the sea, or Jerusalem, or the Garden of Gethsemane. Do these fleeting references take on a greater symbolic significance in the light of the more developed ones? It is hard to see in what way their symbolic significance could be enhanced by considering the other passages. Matthew does not establish such a clear set of associations for τὸ ὄρος that the mere mention of the noun evokes a unified symbolic meaning throughout the Gospel. In fact, the repetitions of τὸ ὄρος could have more to do with the pattern of the Gospel, linking one pericope to another, than with any specific symbolism. If, however, Matthew relied on the power of τὸ ὄρος to evoke earlier stories and traditions, then it is possible that the simple mention of the noun is intended to awaken associations. It is difficult to make a case for the presence of, for instance, Old Testament symbolism in Mt 14:23, for none of the suggested allusions to mountain scenes such as Moses on Sinai⁴⁸ or Mount Zion⁴⁹ add anything to the exegesis of this story. The miracles here take place on the lake, not on the mountain. In fact, Donaldson, although anxious to explore fully the symbolic significance of mountains in Matthew's Gospel, excludes Mt 14:23 from his ὄρος typology because,

—this mountain is not the setting for an extended event in the ministry of Jesus, and the reference is just taken over from Mark with no apparent redactional interest.⁵⁰

Perhaps the several elements in the detailed scenery of Mt 14:22–33 are best considered as the atmospheric backdrop to the events of the narrative, rather than as almost allegorical hermeneutical keys which will open its true meaning.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Davies and Allison, 1991:502.

⁴⁹ See Donaldson, 1985:81. He argues that mountain symbolism throughout Matthew is more likely to be Zion-orientated than Sinai-orientated.

⁵⁰ Donaldson, 1985:12.

⁵¹ E.g. see Gundry, 1982:299–300 on verse 30, “But seeing the [strong] wind, he became afraid”; i.e., fear comes from preoccupation with persecution.”

Narrated time

The sense of time is often important in a story told from more than one perceptual viewpoint. It is important to clarify whether events are happening simultaneously in two different places, or whether they are happening sequentially.⁵² This pericope has three references to time (14:23, 24, 25), which is more than any other pericope in Matthew's Gospel,⁵³ up until 26:20–30, the account of the Last Supper. From chapter 26 onwards, there are sixteen narrated references to time.⁵⁴ In the earlier chapters of the Gospel, references to the evening are rare (7:16, 21:17). In the whole Gospel, there are only two episodes which involve events which happen during the course of a night, this pericope and the arrest and trial of Jesus (26:20–74). The reference to a particular hour or watch is very striking, as the only other instance of this is during the crucifixion, (Ἀπὸ δὲ ἑκτῆς ὥρας σκότος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἕως ὥρας ἑνάτης. 27:45).

Most of the references to time in Matthew's Gospel simply clarify the sequence of events (e.g. 4:12, 14:13) or underline the close relationship between two events (e.g. 11:25, 12:1, 13:1). Most episodes in Matthew's Gospel could be construed as being set in the morning, the afternoon or the evening—the narrator evidently does not consider this a detail important enough to comment upon.⁵⁵

The emphasis on time in 14:22–33 is partly due to the significance of time in the feeding of the five thousand which precedes it; it is the lateness of the hour which precipitates the disciples' request to Jesus (14:15). Time continues to be marked through the story, however: in verse 23 ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης and verse 24 ἤδη, indicating the simultaneous actions of Jesus and the disciples; and in verse 25, τετάρτη δὲ φυλακῇ τῆς νυκτὸς. The whole night passes during the course of this story, most of it in these three verses. This contrasts with 26:20–74, when a number of narrated events pass in the night between dusk and dawn.

⁵² Thus the narrative cliché of Westerns, “Meanwhile, back at the ranch...”

⁵³ Matthew's account of the transfiguration, 17:1–8, has the next highest frequency—two references to time—17:1, 17:5.

⁵⁴ See Mt 26:20, 34, 40, 47, 55, 74–75; 27:1, 27:20, 45, 51, 57, 62, 64; 28:1, 11, 15. Other references to periods of time or times of day are rare—see “that same day,” 13:1; “After six days,” 17:1; “next morning,” 21:18.

⁵⁵ E.g. see 5:1, 8:23, 9:9, etc.

Again, no narrator's comment or explanation is given concerning the delay between the onset of difficulty for the boat and the arrival of Jesus. This passing of time contrasts with the three uses of 'immediately' εὐθέως (verse 22 and 31) and εὐθύς (verse 27). The unusual mention of the fourth watch of the night suggests that this is a significant detail. It may be intended as an echo of certain Old Testament narratives, particularly the time before the appearance of light in the creation story of Genesis 1 and the timing of the crossing of the Reed Sea in Exodus 14. Perhaps the hours of darkness on the cross (27:45), with the specific mention of time, contain a faint echo of this story. On the other hand, its main purpose may be to signal the importance of the action which directly follows it—Jesus walking on the sea.⁵⁶

Use of language

The repetitions are another interesting feature in this narrative. Whole phrases are repeated in consecutive sentences, for instance, ἕως οὐ ἀπολύση τοὺς ὄχλους (verse 22) and καὶ ἀπολύσας τοὺς ὄχλους (verse 23). There are also similar links between verses 25 and 26, 27 and 28, 28 and 29, and 32 and 33. The oral quality of Gospel stories is certainly a possible factor here; both in the sense that the stories told probably originated in oral sources,⁵⁷ and also in the sense that a text like Matthew is designed to be read out loud and heard.⁵⁸ Repetitions are an important part of the craft of story-telling, since they help the audience to grasp significant details and to follow the thread of the story.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the repetitions are surprisingly numerous in this

⁵⁶ See Heil, 1981:10 for the theory that the time of epiphanies is often specified. Although see also the story of the transfiguration, Mt 17:1, where the day is specified but not the time.

⁵⁷ Although note the differences between Mark and Matthew: Mark's episode only has one of these repetitions, Mk 6: 48, περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης and Mk 6:49, ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα. If Mark is the source for Matthew, then this stylistic feature has been added. See also Sanders, 1969:85–87, for detailed statistics challenging the view that Matthew consistently abbreviates Mark's narrative details. Sanders argues that this tendency to abbreviate is only focussed strongly in certain pericopae, e.g. the Gadarene demoniac Mk 5:1–20 and Mt 8:28–34, while others are barely shortened (e.g. by an average of one word per pericope) and almost as many pericopae are lengthened.

⁵⁸ See Kelber, 1983; Stanton, 1992:74; Anderson, 1994:223.

⁵⁹ See Anderson, 1996:236, "—verbal repetition... engages the memory, reduces noise in the communication channel, creates expectations, increases predictability, persuades, and reduces alternative interpretations." This comment is particularly relevant to the type of repetition found in Mt 25:35–39 and 25:42–44; the repetitions of the sort that

narrative; perhaps indicating a number of unusual and surprising features to which the reader's (or hearer's) attention must be drawn.

The repetition of the description of Jesus walking on the sea in verses 25 and 26 gives the reader an action followed by the perception of that action. Similarly, when Jesus identifies himself, ἐγώ εἰμι (verse 27) the words are echoed in Peter's response, εἰ σὺ εἶ (verse 28). These linked pairs of action and reaction, statement and perception, underline the fact that Jesus and his disciples are not only in different places spatially but are also separated in terms of perception and understanding. Jesus is within the disciples' range of vision now, but he is still not within their range of understanding. There are few other Matthean episodes which have a similar pattern of repetition.⁶⁰ The closest example is the pericope concerning the burial of Jesus, (27:57–61). This story contains two repetitions of this type: verse 58, τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ with verse 59, καὶ λαβὼν τὸ σῶμα and verse 60a, ἐν τῷ καινῷ αὐτοῦ μνημείῳ and verse 60b, τῇ θύρᾳ τοῦ μνημείου ἀπῆλθεν. The intention here appears to be clarity; Joseph of Arimathea is identified as the one who requested Jesus' body and the one who places it in his own tomb. The closing of the tomb is carefully described, and witnesses to it are mentioned, (verse 61). This story, along with the pericope which follows it (27:62–66), emphasize that Jesus was dead and buried, and that the tomb was then closed, sealed and guarded.

Does the same motive of painstaking clarity lie behind the repetitions in 14:22–33? Are the phrases repeated so that the reader will be quite clear that Jesus is walking on the water? This is not a complete explanation, because the repetitions are so numerous in 14:22–33, and they begin before the miraculous walking occurs (e.g. in verses 22 and 23) and continue afterwards (e.g. verses 32 and 33). There are also no

Matthew's narrator uses in this passage slow the narrative pace, and so also introduce a kind of hesitancy, a suggestion that this story needs to be heard carefully.

⁶⁰ Goulder gives a fascinatingly detailed account of poetic forms in Matthew, including the 'partic', which is any four point antithesis which has a paradoxical element, e.g. *many are called, few are chosen*. Specialized forms of partic are the 'machaeic', where two of the four terms are the same, and the 'caesaric' where the four terms fall into two pairs. These latter types obviously both involve repetitions, but all Goulder's examples occur in sayings, therefore in direct speech. Mt 14:22–33 therefore still stands out as unusual, as the repetitions mostly occur in the narration. See Goulder, 1974:71–74. Anderson's detailed and innovative study of the contribution of repetition to the structure of Matthew's Gospel is focussed on "—extended repetitions which occur in separate sections of the text," Anderson, 1994:24, and so does not discuss the possible significance of this type of concentrated repetition.

comparable repetitions in the account of the transfiguration (17:1–8), a miraculous story which, it could be argued, has a similar and equal need for clarification.⁶¹ The purpose of the many repetitions in Mt 14:22–33 remains hidden, then, but their effect is to slow the narrative pace, emphasize the alternating perceptual viewpoint, and to contribute to the verbal patterns within the story.

The repetitions of walking on the sea in verses 25 and 26, and of walking on the water in verses 28 and 29 contribute to a chiastic pattern which centres on Jesus' statement in verse 27, *θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε*. Thus the words of Jesus become central to the story. Such a pattern would link Jesus walking on the sea in verse 25 with Peter walking on the water in verse 29; and the disciples crying out in verse 26 with Peter talking to Jesus in verse 28. This is obviously not the only pattern, however, as there would seem to be a parallel between the fear of all the disciples in verse 26 and Peter's fear in verse 30, although, according to the pattern just described, there should instead be a mirroring link between verse 30 and verse 24, perhaps based on the fact that they both mention the wind.⁶² It would be wise, however, to heed John Ashton's comment that chiasms can be in the eye of the beholder and therefore should not be considered definitive structural features.⁶³

Characterization

Wellek and Warren suggest that the simplest form of characterization is naming.⁶⁴ The inner group of disciples all have names, although several are only mentioned once, in the formal list of the twelve. Some disciples have an additional title or description attached to their name; in Matthew's list (10:2–4) the disciple Matthew is *Μαθθαῖος ὁ τελώνης*, for instance, while Judas is *Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης ὁ καὶ παραδὸνς αὐτόν*. Matthew's and Judas' descriptions certainly summarize their only individual actions within the story (see Mt 9:9–10 and 26:14–16, 47–50;

⁶¹ Note, in the case of this episode, Mark's pericope has more repetitions than Matthew's—Mk 9:4 and 9:5; 9:7a and 9:7b.

⁶² For different versions of possible chiasms, see Davies and Allison, 1991:496; Sibinga, 1981:19.

⁶³ His view could be loosely paraphrased from Ecclesiastes 12:12, 'Of the making of many *chiasms* there is no end, and many *patterns* weary the flesh.' See Ashton, 1994:154.

⁶⁴ See Wellek and Warren, 1963:219.

27:3–5), which might make them appear to be characters with only one trait. Judas' actions, however, reveal developments which show him to be a complex character. He asks for money to betray Jesus (26:14–16), betrays him with a kiss (26:48–49), but then throws the money down in the temple (27:3–5). The description of the disciple Matthew does not make him a simple character, either. The designation 'Matthew, the tax collector' does not so much sum up his character as reveal his origins; origins which he has transcended by becoming an itinerant disciple. He is not depicted in stories about questions of tax, for instance, (17:24–27, 22:15–22) as if dealing with taxes was his set role within this story. Most of the disciples, then, rather than being 'types' with only one characteristic, are simply unknown and undescribed.

Simon, also called Peter, is a disciple with two names. He is called 'Peter' from early on in the Gospel (e.g. 4:18, 8:14) but it is clear that he receives the name from Jesus, *σὺ εἶ Πέτρος*, at a key point in the story (16:18). Receiving a new name could indicate a change of character, or it could highlight a previously neglected character trait, or it could be an indication that a character is going to be regarded differently, irrespective of whether or not he or she has changed. In this case, the new name is received within the story, which shows that 'Simon called Peter' has a dynamic role within the plot.

There are, however, additional factors surrounding the writing of a Gospel. As has already been mentioned, there are strong literary reasons for not examining characterization within the Gospels in the same way that one might examine it within a novel. On purely literary grounds, a Gospel is a different kind of text and to treat it as equivalent to a modern novel may obscure some of its most important literary features. Within this kind of tradition, simply mentioning a character's name may evoke a biography of known stories and expected character traits. A change in the character's traits caused by slightly re-interpreting an event, or by adding new events previously unknown, interacts powerfully with the reader's expectations, producing an impact which belies the simplicity of the particular description.

The very brevity of the list of disciples names, for instance, may mask the depth of associations which is being evoked by it, or the possible surprise for the audience that James and John are no longer called by Jesus, *βοανηργές, ὃ ἐστὶν υἱοὶ βροντῆς* (Mark 3:17). Writing within the tradition of a known story makes another dimension of narration available to an author, such that characters can be not only 'round', but 'round' in four dimensions; they have a dynamic complexity

within their own ‘narrative world’, but also continually interact with a ‘narrative world’ above and behind their own.⁶⁵ Matthew can list the names of the twelve, confident that each name evokes some response of recognition from his readers.⁶⁶ These characters already exist, even before they are called forth into his narrative.

What do these considerations offer to an examination of Matthew’s depiction of the character ‘Peter’? In what ways do the characters of Jesus and of the disciples appear in this story? Given the lack of overt narration, a close examination of the actions (therefore the verbs) attributed to a particular character and the words of their direct speech will be the best way to examine the development of the character.

Peter emerges from the collective character ‘the disciples’ when he says, κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ, κέλευσόν με ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σε ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα. He is not separated from the other disciples before this point in this story, and so it can be inferred that he was part of the general cry of the disciples in verse 26. His character is therefore not delineated in opposition to the collective character ‘the disciples’, but emerges from it and then re-merges with it. (He does not, for instance, offer an individual comment on his experience once he has re-entered the boat.) This speech marks the beginning of an episode unique to Matthew, and also the first time within the gospel that Peter emerges from ‘the disciples’ in this way.

This speech is the longest in this story. The conditional εἰ σὺ εἶ conveys some hesitancy and caution. The very inclusion of this phrase as a preamble to Peter’s request conveys this, even if one translates εἰ in the strongest terms as “since”.⁶⁷ What follows is neither a question, (“Lord, may I...?”) nor a statement (“If you commanded me, you know that I would...”) but an imperative requesting an imperative (“Command me to come to you,”). The directness of this choice of words conveys the strength of Peter’s desire to join Jesus in this miracle, yet his complete dependence not just on Jesus’ permission (in which case he could have

⁶⁵ Some twentieth century authors and dramatists have placed their works within known stories precisely to explore this potential, e.g. see Stoppard, 1968 and Rhys, 1968. I am sure that Matthew’s style is not marked by the same conscious exploration of the limits of narrative, but it does share some of the same potential dimensions of discourse.

⁶⁶ A similar observation could be applied to the names in the Genealogy, 1:1–16, which evoke other narratives, e.g. 1:3, 1:5, 1:6.

⁶⁷ See discussion on translation in Davies and Allison, 1991:507, who draw no definite conclusions. See also Thiede, 1986:30 and Blomberg, 1992:235, who come down on the side of ‘since’.

asked a question) but on the direct order of Jesus. Does this reflect the experience of seeing Jesus commanding the lame to walk (e.g. 9:6), the leprous to be made clean (e.g. 8:3)? Is Peter's concept of miracles that they always involve the authoritative command of Jesus, even when it is indirect, as in the delegated authority given to the disciples for their mission journeys (10:1)?

He is dependent on a command, but not lacking in the initiative to obtain it: *κέλευσόν με*, he says. So Peter's speech offers us a relatively cautious conditional clause followed by a vulnerably direct and unadorned imperative; vulnerable because it could be met with a direct refusal. Does this reveal anything about his character? Perhaps that he can be filled with more than one strong emotion, feeling at the same time both astonishment and desire. When he sees a being on the water and then hears Jesus' words, the familiar voice and the unfamiliar sight combine; it is Jesus, but not the Jesus that he thought that he knew. Such a shock on the issue of Jesus' identity cannot pass without comment. *κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ* is less an expression of doubt than the beginning of a new adjustment to a bigger picture of who Jesus is; but it is quickly superseded by the desire to do something, to be close to Jesus and to participate in what he is doing.⁶⁸ Peter's words here pass without a narrator's comment to guide our reaction; is Matthew offering this new episode as a pattern for discipleship, or as a foil to the actions of Jesus, who strides the waves successfully?

If Mark's Gospel is known by Matthew's hearers, these words of Peter will come as a surprise and as a clear departure from Mark's pericope, (Mark 6:45–52). The change would be all the more noticeable because it comes just as the story according to the Markan pattern would be drawing to a conclusion: Jesus has walked on the water, the disciples have cried out, Jesus has identified himself, all that remains is for Jesus to get into the boat and for the wind to cease, leaving the disciples astounded. Yet in Matthew's story, Peter speaks, and what was a miracle of power revealing Jesus' identity becomes also a one-to-one encounter, a moment when Peter participates in what Jesus is doing. This is very striking: if walking on the water is a god-like⁶⁹ ability, how can Peter ask to share it?

⁶⁸ Compare Peter's words at the transfiguration, 17:4.

⁶⁹ Commentators argue over whether this kind of miracle points to Jesus as a hellenistic miracle worker (see Cullman, 1963:277) or as a 'revealer of the Father' (Davies and Allison, 1991:510).

Peter's later words, κύριε, σῶσόν με, are a cry for help, almost a prayer⁷⁰ when he becomes frightened and begins to sink. They echo the words of all the disciples in 8:25, and so they perhaps show that in this moment of fear he is a fellow disciple, beginning to re-merge with the collective character, 'the disciples'. Jesus' rebuke also resembles his rebuke of the disciples in 8:26. This incident with Peter (v. 28–31), then, has both unusual and typical aspects. Peter's fear and doubt is typical of 'the disciples', and his desire to do something as a response to the numinous is typical of his character as it develops, (17:4) and also as it is known in Mark's Gospel, (9:5). This incident is unusual, however, in that it radically re-shapes and extends the Markan pericope, and it opens up questions about the nature of the master-disciple relationship.

This story shows Jesus to be decisive and responsive. Three times the adverb 'immediately' is used to emphasize his actions, verses 22, 27, 31. He is unafraid, and he rescues Peter from drowning and the boat from the strong wind. Each of the verbs of which he is the subject is in its active form, and all but two imply physical action as well as thought.⁷¹ His words are equally decisive, especially his pithy reply to Peter, ἐλθέ.

His first words in direct speech in the story, θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι μὴ φοβεῖσθε are commanding and magisterial. Jesus does not clarify who he is by saying his own name. Many characters throughout Matthew's gospel name him in different ways, as does the narrator, but on this occasion he has no desire to identify himself by a name or a title, ἐγὼ εἰμι suffices; an expression of confident intimacy, but also expressive of an unwillingness to be objectified by a proper noun.⁷²

Jesus' rebuke to Peter begins ὀλιγόπιστε. Matthew's Jesus uses a vocative form of ὀλιγόπιστος four times. On two occasions, he calls the disciples ὀλιγόπιστοι in response to their words to him implying a lack of trust⁷³ in his ability to keep them safe and provide for them, (see 8:26, 16:8). This lack of trust manifests itself in needless distress and worry. Once he seems to be addressing a much wider group (the

⁷⁰ See e.g. LXX Psalm 70:2, κλῖνον πρὸς με τὸ οὖς σου καὶ σῶσόν με. Also see Luz, 1990a:409.

⁷¹ E.g. see ἡγάγκασεν... ἐμβῆναι... ἀπολύση... (14:22), ἀνέβη (14:23), ἦλθεν... περιπατῶν (14:25), ἐπελάβετο (14:31), etc. The two exceptions are in verse 23, προσεύξασθαι and γενομένης.

⁷² This contrasts with the occasions Jesus uses "Son of Man" as a parenthesis to avoid the personal pronoun, e.g. Mt 17:12, 17:22, 19:28, etc.

⁷³ See Barth in Bornkamm, Barth and Held, 1960:106.

crowd, and perhaps even the readers of the Gospel) about a much more chronic lack of trust, manifesting itself in worries about food, drink and clothes (Mt 6:30).⁷⁴ The common factor in these instances seems to be looking ahead to a perceived need and then fearing that one will not be given the resources to meet it. It is not a lack of belief (which would be 'no faith') nor the kind of lack of understanding which characterizes the disciples in Mark's Gospel,⁷⁵ but an inability to live according to one's beliefs in the midst of difficult circumstances.⁷⁶ The only character addressed individually as ὀλιγόπιστε is Peter. The effect of using a title is different from addressing Peter by name and commenting that his faith is small. The title seems to say that this is not only one of your problems, but this is who you are, at least for the moment: a 'little-faith-one', and this is the source of your distress.

Jesus' question, εἰς τί ἐδίστασας; does not ask what happened, but why. It seems to be an invitation to Peter to think for himself about why he doubted. Jesus immediately understood what had caused Peter to begin to sink and offers the question as a challenge for Peter's own benefit. At the same time, Jesus reaches out his hand and catches Peter, showing himself as the one who is near and who rescues, even in a moment of doubt. In his words and in his actions, then, Jesus is portrayed as decisive and responsive, loving and unafraid.

'The disciples' play an understated role in this story. Their actions are reactions or responses, and they do not take the initiative, except perhaps in prostrating themselves in worship (verse 33), although this, in itself, is a response to what has happened. Their two comments in direct speech frame the encounter with Jesus, φάντασμά ἐστιν and ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ. These two identifications both go beyond naming Jesus as their friend and master and move towards identifying him spiritually, at first falsely and then correctly. The title 'Son of God' is given to Jesus first by the devil (4:3, 4:6) and then by the demons possessing two demoniacs (8:29).⁷⁷ It is not implied in either story that this is a false

⁷⁴ This is the only usage reflected in another Gospel, see Luke 12:28.

⁷⁵ E.g. see Mark 6:52, 8:17, 8:21.

⁷⁶ See Luz, 1985:369, who links the use of the term in Mt 6:30 with rabbinic comment on Exodus 16:4 and Numbers 11:32, concerning the Israelites' lack of trust over the collection of manna. He describes ὀλιγόπιστος as "zwischen Unglauben und Glauben," Luz, 1985:369.

⁷⁷ In connection with the title 'Son of God', Kingsbury puts stress on the words of God in 3:17, see Kingsbury, 1984; but there is a palpable difference between the phrases, "the Son of God," (a title), and God saying, "My beloved son," (an expression

attribution, but rather a supernatural insight, self-evident to demonic beings, although hidden from human beings. Twice, witnesses cry out that Jesus is truly God's Son—here in the boat (14:33) and at the foot of the cross (27:54). Twice those who pass by the cross mock him by referring to the title 'Son of God' and contrasting that with his present evident weakness and powerlessness (27:40, 27:43). Together, these uses of 'Son of God' imply that the bearer of the title has considerable power as well the status of a special relationship to God.⁷⁸

Each of the characters in this story, Jesus, Peter and the disciples, speak about who Jesus is and attempt to deal with a situation in which his miraculous actions have made him unrecognizable. The varying narrative viewpoint, the lack of comments from the narrator and the use of repetition add to the sense of separation and uncertainty. The character Peter becomes the focal point for this theme with his successive caution and directness, bold action and then fearful doubt. Only Jesus is unwavering and actively decisive, yet still a mysterious figure, identifying himself solely as ἐγώ εἰμι.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the characterization in this pericope has emphasized the significant role played by the character Peter. Yet it has also highlighted the way that he emerges from, and re-merges with, the collective character 'the disciples'. He is not consistently differentiated from them, and yet his words to Jesus and his attempt to walk on the water contrast with their more passive role in the boat. These two observations may point towards why it is difficult to interpret the significance of Peter's actions: does he act as an archetypal disciple? Or is an individual role

of love and approval) even though they are descriptive of the same filial link; see Chatman on speech act theory, Chatman, 1978:161–166.

⁷⁸ The implications of being God's Son are considerably expanded through the actions and attitudes of different characters, however. For instance, the very fact that those who pass the cross mock Jesus with what the implied reader knows to be a correct title for him—the Son of God—begins to open up questions of what this relationship to God really means. He is truly the Son of God, yet he does not come down from the cross, therefore (contrary to the belief of the passers-by) the cross and God's Son do belong together. Peter's confession in 16:16 adds yet another element in that it begins, σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς before mentioning 'Son of God', and so refers more directly to Jesus' calling and mission. It is ironic that this is the same combination of titles used by Caiaphas to trap Jesus.

intended, so that he is either more of a hero (or more of a fool) than the other disciples? The fact that he re-merges with 'the disciples' suggests that he does have an archetypal role, but there are tensions and contrasts in the text. A literary study points to the ambiguity inherent in the narrative which perhaps legitimizes the range of exegetical judgments offered by historical scholars. It does not, however, explain the vehemency with which some of these views are held.⁷⁹ An examination of some of the 'effects' of this passage may enable us to see some of these views in a wider cultural context and so aid us in making a more nuanced interpretation of Peter's actions.

The portrayal of Jesus continues to raise some issues. As I indicated in the conclusion to the historical discussion, the christological implications of attributing the story to one or another source are considerable. This literary examination anchors reflections on the portrayal of Jesus to the detail of the text which expresses his words and actions. Here he is shown to be decisive and responsive, and to speak in a way which is commanding and magisterial. He does not identify himself by name but by the simple ἐγώ εἰμι which, as well as being an expression of confident intimacy is heavy with possibly divine associations. Again, the examination of 'effects' may bring a wider range of christological possibilities into focus and provide some insight into the larger critical questions which lie behind certain interpretative judgements.

The use of repetitions is a notable feature of the style of this pericope. A comparison with other pericopae has clarified that it is not typical of Matthew. The varying narrative viewpoint is also an unusual feature. It illustrates one key structural difference from resurrection accounts, which are told exclusively from the viewpoint of the disciples and so have already, in this sense, become stories of the emergent church.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ E.g. see Tasker, 1961:145–146 for the view that Peter's actions are presumptuous; Kee, 1993:627 says that this incident "presents vividly and succinctly Peter's brashness." Yet others see it illustrating Peter's primacy, e.g. see Albright and Mann, 1984:181; Green, 1953:194—"At this point we meet with the first of the four remarkable additions to the Markan framework designed to throw into relief the supreme authority of Peter, as Vicar of Christ on earth." Even Davies and Allison's much more careful description of Peter's actions as 'a difficult endeavour,' and 'exposing himself to trial' imply an assessment of the attempt as heroic, see Davies and Allison, 1991:509. Garland, on the hand, sees Peter's desire to walk on the water as wholly inspired by doubt, see Garland, 1993:158.

⁸⁰ The issue of the varying viewpoint is not raised by Maddon (Maddon, 1997), although his argument that Mt 14:22–33 is a misplaced resurrection account is based

The alternating viewpoint in this story invites us to view the unfolding events from different ‘positions’ and so does not allow the implied reader to settle into a single perspective. The story is as much about Jesus’ actions as it is about Peter’s, and it is equally about the disciples’ reactions. To reduce it to a single perspective is to diminish it. When we compare this with the Markan and Johannine pericopae, we see that these particular features are unique to Matthew. Matthew has subtly altered the style of his source and then also added the Peter incident (Mt 14:28–31). He has made this story his own and yet made it different from other pericopae within his Gospel. Matthew has done a lot to make this story stand out, yet literary critics work hard to make it blend in. It tends to be inadequately described as ‘the second stilling of the storm’ linking it too closely with 8:23–27,⁸¹ or as an illustration of the fact that even the disciples do not always respond with faith,⁸² which is a strange summary of a story which concludes with their confession, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ. This highlights the weakness of focussing literary criticism solely on large scale narrative structures: pericopae like this one, perhaps intended to stand proud, are trimmed down to fit a larger scheme. Historical critics do something similar, however, in being over-hasty to assign the story to a particular source, whether Old Testament, Hellenistic or Buddhist. These are both processes of assimilation, making the story conform to expectation. A close literary reading is an antidote to this over-eager assimilation of the pericope to motifs and concerns assumed to be the keys to the text.⁸³ Why do present-day scholars decide to make this assimilation when both literary and historical evidence weigh against it? This will be an issue to explore through some aspects of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text.

Three areas are thus suggested for further exploration: the portrayal of Jesus, including the christological issues which attach to different interpretations; the portrayal of Peter and his relationship with the

on the similarity in stylistic features.

⁸¹ E.g. Howell, 1990:142, Anderson, 1994:176.

⁸² E.g. see Howell, 1990:142, where he describes this pericope as presenting ‘the theme of acceptance’ ambiguously, although he does say that their confession represents a development of their understanding. He makes no comment on the theme of identity.

⁸³ See Kermode, 1979:118–119, “—the story of modern Biblical exegesis (another history, with its own provision of prejudices) seems to confirm the view that it takes a powerful mind to attend to what is written at the expense of what it is written about.”

other disciples; and the broader issue of how to approach the discussion of such an extraordinary miracle. These are the preliminary questions which we now bring to the discussion of two aspects of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this passage.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘EFFECTS’ OF MT 14:22–33 IN SOME NINETEENTH-CENTURY THEOLOGICAL TEXTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the ‘effects’ of Mt 14:22–33 in some theological writings of the nineteenth century. The period was one of particular upheaval in Britain and Germany as theology struggled to maintain its previously unassailable role as a fundamental source of knowledge about the nature of the world. The concept of a miracle, and so then the accounts of miracles in the Gospels, were a fraught topic of debate. Philosophical challenges to traditional doctrines date back to Spinoza (1632–1677) and the English Deists¹ at least, but the nineteenth century is the period in which these challenges begin to be felt *within* theology, rather than as assaults from without. In fact, even writers who assert the historical reality of miracles do not simply appeal to authority and tradition but offer arguments based on contemporary categories of thought. Ideas about the essential unity and coherence of the universe on the one hand and the central place of humanity within it on the other pervade the writings of this period,² as theologians and biblical scholars attempt to articulate a vision of Christianity for their time. Their hopes for the future of religion do differ radically, but some of the intellectual axioms which form the contours of their thinking are remarkably similar. This is the period in which the theories and discoveries of the Enlightenment cease to be articulated as separate issues but coalesce to become a habit of thought, a background ‘given’, the implications of which must be accommodated within theology if

¹ E.g. Hume (1711–76), Toland (1670–1722) etc.

² Cf. Westcott’s description: “One the one hand, the proud advances of physical science, which place in a clearer light the symmetry and order of external nature, invest the idea of law with an absolute majesty inconceivable at an earlier time. On the other, a strange love for the vivid realization of every incident presented to us, which is attested by the scenic histories of the day, makes us impatient of the mystery which hangs over the acts of a divine Sovereign.”

Westcott, 1859:4–5.

religious faith is to survive. This struggle is carried on in public in best-selling *Lives of Jesus*,³ published sermons and lectures as well as theological and philosophical treatises. The writers themselves appear to be aware that they live in interesting times.⁴

The texts discussed in this chapter are viewed through two lenses: the universe (*the grand, unbroken harmony*⁵) and humanity (*the lordship of man's will*⁶) in the hope that this pair of 'enlightenment spectacles' will bring into focus the thought of this period about walking on the water. It could be argued that to begin an examination of a varied group of 'effects' by exploring their similarity to one another risks masking their individual contributions. Would it not be better to consider the authors text by text, treating each relevant passage in isolation from the others? This is, in fact, the way in which I approach the works of art in *Chapter Five*, but such an approach is not appropriate here. All the texts in this period which comment on Mt 14:22–33 do so in the context of larger discussions on the possibility of miracles happening at all or on the nature and status of the Gospel texts; therefore a compendium of short extracts would often miss the authors' main points. For instance, Schleiermacher's curt assessment that the miracle of walking on the water is "pointless" (*zwecklose*)⁷ is an illuminating comment when considered in conjunction with his christological method, but if it is considered in isolation, it appears merely derogatory. The 'effects' in this chapter also stand in a much closer relation to one another in time and space than the works of art in *Chapter Five*. It would be quite artificial to assemble those works into a single progressive history, but it would be equally misleading to treat these texts as if they were not inter-related,

³ Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863) had forty-nine editions by 1893. So successful were 'Lives of Jesus' that in 1870, Farrar was commissioned by Cassell & Company to write a *Life of Jesus* for £500 and given a £100 travel allowance to visit Palestine. See Pals, 1982:79.

⁴ E.g. Neander's view of the nineteenth century as a period of upheaval, philosophically and spiritually; see Neander, 1852:157.

⁵ From Hanna's *The Earlier Years of Our Lord's Life on Earth*. (1864:265).

⁶ From Trench's *Notes on the Miracles of our Lord*. (1850:285). The majority of texts considered in this chapter predate Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1860), and even those written later arguably avoid the relativisation of humanity which develops when evolutionary theory permeates everyday thought. A comparable time lag in ideas is observable in the development of Dodd's eschatology: he states that it is impossible "—for philosophy to admit the idea of finite time," (Dodd, 1936:93) although he was writing sixteen years after Einstein had first published his theory of special and general relativity.

⁷ See Schleiermacher, 1864:235. Gilmour translates it as "meaningless," Schleiermacher, 1975:220.

sometimes directly as statements and ripostes.⁸ A responsible account of these 'effects' will not treat them as separate items clipped from larger texts nor as isolated interpretations unrelated to their theological milieu, but as an opportunity to listen in to something more akin to a complex, varied and sometimes overheated conversation.

Of course there would be other ways of framing this discussion, some of which would highlight contrasts between the texts rather than their similarities. One could divide them into British and German,⁹ for instance, or into theological categories such as supernaturalist, mediating or sceptical. However, an examination of 'effects' from a *Wirkungsgeschichte* perspective does not aim to be merely descriptive but to foster a creative and critical dialogue between the 'effect' and present-day interpretations of the biblical text. A national division would be too historically focussed for this purpose as it would tend to highlight only cultural idiosyncrasy, a theological division would not be historical enough in that it would divide the works into abstract, ahistorical categories. The advantage of the categories used in this chapter is that they are derived from the writings themselves and yet they highlight some patterns of thought which I will argue continue to influence the interpretation of this miracle in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

The examination of these texts complements the examination of the works of art. While the artefacts concentrate on conveying the story in a way akin to a meditation, and so suspend disbelief or critical questions, these texts discuss the story and how it may be understood plausibly in relation to other sources of human knowledge. The artists chose (or were commissioned) to give a detailed depiction of this miracle, the

⁸ E.g. Schleiermacher's *Leben Jesu* and Strauss' *Der Christus des Glaubens und der Jesus der Geschichte*; or Strauss' *Leben Jesu* and Mill's *Observations on the attempted application of pantheistic principles to the theory and historic criticism of the Gospel*.

⁹ There are significant differences here which Pals attributes to the need for reform in the teaching of theology at Oxford and Cambridge, "—where the governing ideal was the gentleman cleric." Pals, 1982:128. A fuller account would need to consider not only the forward-looking influence of Kantian and Hegelian speculation in Germany but also the enthusiasm for patristic scholarship and the retrogressive tradition of thought in England. Something of the different national attitudes comes across in the terms in which Strauss is condemned for his *Leben Jesu*: in Germany he is called 'Judas' (a disciple who betrays the faith from within; see Strauss' reference to Eschenmayer's pamphlet, Strauss, 1973:liv), in Britain he is accused of writing a book of 'outrageous infidelity' which is in enormously bad taste (the act of a transgressor and social outsider; see Mill, 1840:5).

authors often struggle with a passage which they wish could be omitted from their sources.¹⁰ Their reflections offer us something which works of art cannot: a discursive and analytic attempt to connect the narrative with the modern world.

THE GRAND, UNBROKEN HARMONY

Writers of this period share a common vision that the universe operates in unbroken harmony. This harmony is not the music of the spheres or a cosmology centred on God, but an observable and predictable pattern, open to human exploration and understanding.¹¹ The vision is grand, but the element of mystery is almost absent.¹² If beliefs about God are to continue to be credible, they must be shown to be in tune with the grand harmony.¹³ They do not belong to a different sphere of knowledge or area of experience, for all truth is one, whether it is scientific, historical, philosophical or theological.¹⁴ For a writer such as Strauss, the pinnacle of knowledge is a philosophical understanding of reality: the idea within the fact.¹⁵ Accordingly, in his concluding dissertation to his *Leben Jesu* he asserts that the focus of faith needs to change from a “sensible empirical fact” to a “spiritual and divine idea” (*aus einem sinnlich empirischen zu einem geistigen und göttlichen geworden*) which has its confirmation “no longer in history but in philosophy.” (*nicht mehr in der Geschichte, sondern in der Philosophie*).¹⁶ It is not that, for Strauss,

¹⁰ E.g. the conservative Smith says that down the centuries it has been “—a trial to faith and a jest to unbelief.” Smith, 1905:238.

¹¹ E.g. Trench, 1850:15, “The very idea of the world, as more than one name it bears testifies, is that of an order.”

¹² Westcott is an exception: he speaks of the mystery of God’s actions and the unimaginable, silent nature of miracles of power. See Westcott, 1859:15.

¹³ Notice Trench’s refutation of Spinoza, Trench, 1850:14–15. He acknowledges that if a miracle were “against nature” then Spinoza would be right, “—since the unnatural, the contrary to order, is of itself the ungodly, and can in no way therefore be affirmed of a divine work.” Miracles, then, are not ‘against’ nature, but are ‘beside’ it or ‘beyond’ it. See Trench, 1850:18.

¹⁴ Schleiermacher may appear to be an exception to this idea, since he separates theology from science by basing theology in religious experience. However, he was keen to assert that faith and science must agree, see Schleiermacher, 1975:24 (Schleiermacher, 1864:24).

¹⁵ Strauss, 1973:781.

¹⁶ Strauss, 1973:780–81 (Strauss, 1837:742).

history¹⁷ (and indeed, physics)¹⁸ are not reliable sources of truth, it is that their truth will self-evidently form an unbroken harmony with all other sources of human knowledge and the true nature of this harmony can best be perceived through philosophy.

Other writers, particularly British ones, are impatient with this emphasis on philosophical speculation.¹⁹ Their sense of the unity of all knowledge is based in a more Newtonian emphasis on natural laws.²⁰ This scientific element to the idea of harmony helps to distinguish it from earlier conceptions of unity, such as the medieval chain of being; nineteenth century unity is not so much revealed as discovered, it does not look back to a traditional source of knowledge but forward to further human achievements. It nevertheless rises to cosmic axioms far beyond the deductions of the natural science of the time. For instance, Mozley lists as difficult to comprehend but unquestionably true the “infinity of space, infinity of time”.²¹ It is the very nature of these infinities, their “fixed and orderly, stately and beautiful array,”²² which generates so much optimism for nineteenth century thinkers.²³ They are temperamentally as well as philosophically unsuited to eschatological ideas, for instance, or to the articulation of a forceful doctrine of sin and

¹⁷ History is an important element in Strauss’ thought. He sets out with the clear expectation that the Gospel accounts are largely unhistorical and that attempts to understand them as history are wholly inadequate (see Strauss, 1973:39–40) but he pays such meticulous attention to the historical critical task precisely because, if, for instance, accounts of miracles could be shown to be historical, then his understanding of the universe would have to be revised. Accordingly, the category of myth is defined as specifically *not* historical rather than as historically ambiguous.

¹⁸ See Strauss’ comments on the law of gravity in relation to walking on the water; Strauss, 1973:499.

¹⁹ E.g. see Hanson, 1869:ix–x, “in these matters an Englishman, who has had some experience of men and things, may perhaps be as well qualified to judge as a German professor or divine. Admitting the essential services that Germans have rendered to the cause of free thought and critical investigation, and that, but for what they have done, such a work as the present would have been well nigh impossible, it may, nevertheless, happen that a practical mind, looking at the history from a less speculative point of view, may be able to discover the causes and connections of events in circumstances and influences that have been hitherto overlooked or under-rated.”

²⁰ For instance, note the way that Mozley and Hanna discuss miracles as conforming to a higher law, not violating the laws of nature. See Mozley, 1865:162; Hanna, 1864:263.

²¹ Mozley, 1865:91.

²² Hanna, 1864:263.

²³ The writers of these texts are mostly university theologians and professors—well-fed and socially influential gentlemen. This study is not meant to imply that these views were universally held in nineteenth century Europe.

fallenness. The idea that something is fundamentally wrong with the universe is not prominent.²⁴ How does this vision of grand, unbroken harmony affect the concept of the miraculous and, in particular, the treatment of the story of Jesus and Peter walking on the water?

Mozley encapsulates the nineteenth century experience beautifully:

How is it that sometimes when the same facts and truths have been before men all their lives, and produced but one impression, a moment comes when they look different from what they did?²⁵

Miracles had begun to look decidedly different. Westcott expresses it in these terms:

In nothing has the change of feeling during the last century been more violent than in the popular estimation of miracles. At the beginning they were singled out as the master-proof of the Christian faith: now they are kept back as difficulties in the way of its reception.²⁶

Perhaps one reason for this is that a miracle is an exceptional event by definition and exceptions threaten harmony and unity. The apparent discord sounded by the Gospel accounts of miracles is dealt with in two alternative ways: either by dispensing with the miraculous element altogether (for instance, by rationalising the stories²⁷ or redesignating them as ‘myths’)²⁸ or by adapting the description of the grand, unbroken harmony so that the miraculous is included as part of the orderly pattern.²⁹

The rationalist approach treats Gospel pericopae as historical accounts which are faulty or misleading in certain respects. They do not contain symbolic or mythic elements which need interpreting, but inaccurate details which need correcting. This means, in practice, that an interpretation of a miracle story becomes a retelling of the narrative with any supernatural elements transformed into natural occurrences.³⁰ This kind of rationalist alchemy often results in a composition which

²⁴ An exception would be Neander, whose doctrine of the Fall plays a subtle and interesting role in his defense of miracles as historical. See Neander, 1852:137–8.

²⁵ Mozley, 1865:1.

²⁶ Westcott, 1859:4.

²⁷ E.g. Paulus, 1828.

²⁸ E.g. Strauss, 1837.

²⁹ E.g. see Hanna, 1864; Mozley, 1865; and Farrar, 1874.

³⁰ See Paulus, 1828:358–359, “In der Natur ist Gott gewiß immer.”

bears little relation to the detail of the text;³¹ it is a new narrative with no genuinely historical reasoning to recommend it. Yet while the main point of the miracle story is disregarded, the husk of surrounding incidental detail must be preserved. This gives rise to some absurd narrative contortions. For instance, Paulus' section on walking on the water in his 1828 book is entitled, "*Die Fahrt im Sturm. Wie Jesus nachfolgte?*"³² Having rejected the supernatural account, the question of how Jesus rejoined his disciples becomes of disproportionate importance. Paulus argues that it was the ancient practice to navigate close to the shore,³³ and that ἐπὶ always means 'above' (*über*) rather than 'on' (*an*) or 'near' (*neben*).³⁴ He concludes that Jesus was walking on the shore and was seen in the darkness (*Nachtdunkel*) by his disciples as a ghostly spirit (*Spuckgeist*) appearing above the water.³⁵ The image to which some people have become accustomed, of Peter then stepping forth with a halo on his head, is a fantasy; Peter swam as he does in John 21:7 because a breaking wave swept over him.³⁶

Strauss works with a similarly *a priori* exclusion of the supernatural,³⁷ but a very much more carefully worked out approach to the texts. For the first time in the study of the Gospels, he suggests that the texts do not primarily record history (faulty or otherwise) but myth.³⁸ The historical residue of the life of Jesus to be gleaned from the texts is minimal, but this is unimportant as the mythic vision conveyed by them points to an eternal philosophical reality. Strauss' grand vision makes it possible to appreciate the details of the texts in a new literary way, without the need to amend them or justify them historically. In the discussion of each pericope, Strauss pokes fun at the endeavours of both rationalists and traditionalists to explain the texts in historical terms, thereby reinforcing the superiority of his own approach.

³¹ See Strauss' objection to Paulus' exegesis of ἐπὶ in Mt 14:25. Strauss, 1973:500.

³² Paulus, 1828:357–365.

³³ See Paulus, 1828:357.

³⁴ See Paulus, 1828:359.

³⁵ See Paulus, 1828:359–60.

³⁶ See Paulus, 1828:360.

³⁷ For instance, he suggests that a knowledge of cause and effect eliminates a belief in direct divine intervention; see Strauss, 1973:39.

³⁸ The idea of using the category of 'myth' in Biblical Studies does not originate with Strauss; Eichhorn (1752–1827) and Gabler (1753–1826) applied these ideas to the Old Testament and others had categorized the Gospel birth narratives in this way, but he is the first to call so many Gospel pericopae myths. See Lawler, 1986:23–25.

In the discussion of walking on the water, Strauss points out the inadequacies of Paulus' interpretation that Jesus is on the shore, based on his translation of ἐπί. If the disciples' boat is near the shore and Jesus is standing on the shore, how can Peter get down out of the boat, walk and then sink?³⁹ The very structure of the story resists such attempts to rationalise it.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Strauss also pokes fun⁴¹ at Olhausen's suggestion that Jesus had a superior kind of body (*einer höheren Leiblichkeit*), impregnated with the powers of a higher world.⁴² If Jesus went under the waters of the river Jordan at his baptism, asks Strauss, does this mean that he got progressively lighter throughout his ministry and so could eventually walk on water? Or could he increase or reduce his specific gravity at will? Behind Strauss' quips lies the absolute conviction that a human body cannot be exempt from the law of gravity.⁴³ In Strauss' eyes, any attempt to justify the miracle as historical would involve an explanation which is absurd and plunges the commentator into "an abyss of absurdities." (*Abgrund von Ungereimtheiten*).⁴⁴ Strauss then abandons these attempts to make history from the text and discusses how and why such a myth might have developed.

It is the same urge to *explain* the supernatural which motivates both Strauss and Olhausen. But while Strauss explains the origin of the text, a conservative like Olhausen tries to imagine the physical conditions which would make this miracle possible. This leads him to offer an inadequate interpretation which is easily mocked, theologically as well as scientifically. The intellectual ethos of this period seems particularly intolerant of mystery; to describe something as 'a mystery' would be to fall back on categories of understanding no longer relevant to the modern age. The whole concept of the grand unbroken harmony is rooted in explanation and the advance of knowledge; anything which is not at least partially explainable is, as Strauss expresses it, "something

³⁹ See Strauss, 1973:500. Paulus' solution that the idea that Peter walked at all is a later pious fantasy is not one Strauss considers worthy of discussion.

⁴⁰ See Strauss, 1973:500.

⁴¹ See Ebrard, 1863:23–24, "*Strauss displays throughout an unmistakeable frivolity. Of the elevating, heart-stirring effect, which the Gospels produce in every pure mind, not the slightest trace is to be found.*"

⁴² See Strauss, 1973:499; Strauss, 1837:182.

⁴³ "—bildet doch den eigentlichen Knoten der Erzählung dieß, daß in derselben der Leib Jesu von einem Gesetze, welches sonst ausnahmslos alle menschlichen Leiber in seinen Banden hält, von dem Gesetz der Schwere." Strauss, 1837:182. (Strauss, 1973:500).

⁴⁴ Strauss, 1973:500 (Strauss, 1837:183).

which cannot be conceived,” (*Undenkbare*).⁴⁵ The desire to explain is perhaps best illustrated from texts which argue that the miracle is both supernatural and historical.

Hanna, Mozley and Trench all present an argument based on ‘higher law’. Just as there are observable laws of nature, so there are normally unseen laws of God’s power which can override the laws of nature. The analogy is often made with human movement:⁴⁶ if I lift my arm or leg, I effectively overcome the normal effects of gravity by the exercise of my will, if God causes someone to walk on the water then he effectively overcomes gravity by the exercise of his will. Mozley offers this observation:

The action of God’s Spirit in the miracle of walking on the water is no more inconceivable than the action of my own spirit in holding up my own hand.⁴⁷

This might appear to be an apologetic based purely on God’s authority: these things happen because God chooses to do them. But there is another aspect to the argument—God chooses to do them in accordance with a higher law, rather than in violation of a lower one. The idea that God breaks into the natural order by interrupting the laws of nature is a thought which is disturbing in its chaotic implications; Hanna no sooner voices it than he begins to qualify it with the concept of a higher law:

And yet when we speak thus of a miracle as a breaking-in upon the ordinary and established course of nature, let us not think of it as if it were discord thrust into a harmony; something loose, irregular, disjointed, coming in to mar the beautiful and orderly progression. The vital powers, for instance, in plants and animals, are ever modifying the mechanical powers, the laws of motion; the will of man comes in, in still more striking manner, to do the same thing with all the powers and processes of nature. You do not say that such crossings and counteractions of lower by higher laws disturb the harmony of nature; they go to constitute it. And we believe that just as falsely as you would say that the order of nature was broken, the law of gravitation was violated, when the sap ascends in the stem of the tree, and is distributed upwards through its branches; just as falsely is it said of the miracles of Christianity, that they break that order, or violate any of nature’s laws; for did we but know enough of that

⁴⁵ See Strauss, 1973:li (Strauss, 1837:x).

⁴⁶ E.g. see Trench, 1850:16; Mozley 1865:163; Wace, 1883:105.

⁴⁷ Mozley, 1865:163.

spiritual kingdom for whose establishment and advancement they were wrought, we should perceive that here too there was law and order, and that what we now call miracles were but instances of the lower yielding to the higher; that the grand, unbroken harmony of the vast universe, material, mental, moral, spiritual, may be sustained and promoted.⁴⁸

It is vital for Hanna's peace of mind that he does not present a picture of God as above all laws or in conflict with them; such a God would be a cosmic anarchist, as unpleasant as he was implausible. Farrar expresses a similarly orderly view of God: he suggests that when the sceptic sees laws of nature, he concludes that they are irreversible and self-originated; when the believer sees the same laws of nature, he concludes that behind them is a lawgiver and author of all laws.⁴⁹ Trench also insists that, even in miracles, God does not commit acts *against* natural laws.⁵⁰

These ways of framing the argument suggest that the conception of God is being shaped to fit the axiom of unity and harmony, rather than the other way around. The laws of physical science can be suspended in some fashion, but only as long as the orderly pattern of the universe as a whole is not disturbed. God can act in unexpected ways, as long as there is a higher point of view from which his actions can be seen to be orderly and unexceptional. For an exception is a violation, a discord, it stalks like a "loose, irregular [and] disjointed"⁵¹ monster across the landscape of enlightened reality. Therefore for the miracle to be acceptable, it must be a more tidy concept, a neat part of the fabric of creation, almost unremarkable when properly understood.

Farrar suggests that walking on the water is perhaps of all the miracles the most difficult "—for our feeble faith to believe or understand."⁵² He does not elucidate the reasons for this, but states that if one believes God sent his Son to die for us then one can believe that the Son of God has authority over all things, including natural laws "—and to us the miraculous, when thus attested, will be no way more stupendous

⁴⁸ Hanna, 1864:264–265. See also Mozley, 1865:163–164, especially p. 163, "The constitution of nature, then, disproves the incredibility of the Divine suspension of physical law; but more than this, it creates a presumption for it. For the laws of which we have experience are themselves in an ascending scale." Also Trench, 1850:18, "The miracles, then, not being against nature, however they may be beside and beyond it, are in no respect slights cast upon its ordinary and every-day workings."

⁴⁹ See Farrar, 1874:xii.

⁵⁰ See Trench, 1850:14–15; 285.

⁵¹ Hanna, 1864:264.

⁵² Farrar, 1874:408.

than the natural.”⁵³ He then uses the story itself in a sermonic way, as an encouragement to faith in the face of disbelief and doubt. Peter becomes the archetypal disciple for us, facing not just a physical storm but “swelling waves of disbelief” and “rising winds of doubt”⁵⁴ and we, like Peter, must fix our eyes on Jesus:

—but if we turn away our eyes from Him in whom we have believed—if, as it is so easy to do, and as we are so much tempted to do, we look rather at the power and fury of those destructive elements than at Him who can help and save—then we too shall inevitably sink. Oh, if we feel, often and often, that the flood-waters threaten to drown us, and the deep to swallow up the tossed vessel of our Church and Faith, may it again and again be granted us to hear amid the storm and the darkness, and the voices prophesying war, those two sweetest of the Saviour’s utterances—‘Fear not. Only believe.’ ‘It is I. Be not afraid.’⁵⁵

For Farrar, living among “the voices prophesying war”, to believe wholeheartedly in the historical reality of this miracle is to walk on the water yourself.

The theme of the grand unbroken harmony shows itself to be a potent influence in rationalising, sceptical and traditionally conservative texts. It makes the Gospel stories of miracles difficult to account for, because miracles appear to be singular events and so threaten the harmony of the laws of nature. The writers give different responses to this threat, but they all uphold an unbroken harmony, either by denying that miracles happen or affirming that there is a higher, unseen law within the terms of which even a miracle is not an exceptional event. Both sceptics and conservatives suggest that the miracle of walking on the water represents a particularly stark example of miraculous activity; Strauss says that its ‘peculiar difficulty’ lies in the exemption of Jesus from the law of gravity which effects every other human body,⁵⁶ Ebrard calls it a miracle which had no subordinate object,

—but in which the design of the miracle in itself is clearly brought to view.⁵⁷

⁵³ Farrar, 1874:409.

⁵⁴ Farrar, 1874:409.

⁵⁵ Farrar, 1874:409.

⁵⁶ See Strauss, 1973:499.

⁵⁷ See Ebrard, 1863:300–301.

The idea that walking on the water (among other ‘nature miracles’) is the zenith of miracle stories makes sense if they are viewed primarily as suspensions of the laws of nature: this story then becomes one of the most blatant and extreme exemplars of the genre, the hardest for “our feeble faith to believe or understand”,⁵⁸ as Farrar puts it. There is another question which makes this miracle even more difficult to understand—why did Jesus do it? What motive would account for his action? What purpose would such a miracle serve? This brings us to the second lens of our enlightenment spectacles, the theme of what it means to be human.

THE LORDSHIP OF MAN’S WILL

For the twenty-first century reader, the phrase ‘the lordship of man’s will’ might imply arrogance and danger: it could be argued that there can only be lordship where there is a corresponding subservience, often established and maintained by force. Where human beings assert their wills on the world either other human beings or the environment suffer the damaging consequences. We are wary of human power, whereas many nineteenth century writers revelled in it. ‘The lordship of man’s will’ for them carried the promise of progress, the mastery which comes with increased knowledge. The increasing lordship of Man’s will was a cause for celebration and excitement; much more stimulating, Strauss suggests, than the stories of the New Testament:

And shall we interest ourselves more in the cure of some sick people in Galilee, than in the miracles of intellectual and moral life belonging to the history of the world [*die Wunder des Gemüthslebens und der Weltgeschichte*]*—in the increasing, the almost incredible dominion of man over nature—in the irresistible force of ideas, [die unwiderstehliche Macht der Idee] to which no unintelligent matter, whatever its magnitude, can oppose any enduring resistance.*⁵⁹

The people who were achieving this “incredible dominion” were adult, male, prosperous, well-educated and western European. Quite unconsciously, the template for effective human living was modelled on the

⁵⁸ Farrar, 1874:408.

⁵⁹ Strauss, 1973:781; Strauss, 1837:742.

experiences and values of a western European gentleman.⁶⁰ For both Strauss and Farrar, with their widely differing theological views, it stood to reason that the Christian thought of their day was the jewel in the crown of all the philosophical, spiritual, moral and cultural development throughout the world and throughout history.⁶¹ Such intellectual and spiritual colonialism and such optimism about the exercise of human power were bound to shape and colour their picture of the historical Jesus and so their interpretations of accounts of his miracles.

During the course of his lectures on the life of Jesus⁶² Schleiermacher introduces a discussion of the inadequacy of traditional christological formulae, such as the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. His point is that such formulae make it impossible to develop a picture of Jesus as a real human being. One either has to imagine that his divine nature is quiescent to his human nature (in which case, he effectively does not have a divine nature) or one imagines that his divine nature is fully active, thereby negating his human limitations.⁶³ Where earlier theologians were content to create a fence around the parameters of orthodox belief, Schleiermacher wants to create a portrait, a plausible picture of the Jesus of history to whom the doctrine points. He does not want to abandon the conviction that Jesus is a unique figure for faith, but he is not content to “propagate a dead letter”,⁶⁴ he wants instead to convey a comprehensible biography which includes the divine aspect of Jesus. If this proves impossible to achieve, however, then the claims of faith, not the claims of comprehensibility, must be abandoned:

—we must face the question: Can we possibly conceive of the divine in the human (*Göttliches in Menschlichem*)? That is the point about which in the final analysis the matter revolves. If that were wholly inconceivable (*keine Weise denkbar*), we would reach the point at which that interest of faith would have to be abandoned, for what would be positively unthinkable (*positiv nicht denkbar wäre*) could also possess no reality (*keine Realität*) for us.

⁶⁰ Schleiermacher's Christ, for instance, turns water into wine to fulfill his obligation to liven up a social occasion; he does not carry his own cross, not because he is injured and weak, but because he has a higher social standing and so does not come from the cross-carrying criminal classes. See Schleiermacher, 1975:220, 418, (Schleiermacher, 1864:235, 446).

⁶¹ Strauss, 1973:758, Farrar, 1874:xiii–xiv.

⁶² Given from 1819–1832. Published thirty-two years later, reconstructed from his notes and the notes of his students. See Schleiermacher, 1975:xi, xvi.

⁶³ See Schleiermacher, 1975:80–87 (Schleiermacher, 1864:84–93).

⁶⁴ Schleiermacher, 1975:13 (Schleiermacher, 1864:12), speaking of the attacks on his Christology in *The Christian Faith*.

It could exert no conscious influence (*kein bewußter Einfluß*) except by self-deception, and then there would be no other choice than to become rationalists.”⁶⁵

Jesus must be in some sense explainable to be believable, and in this way the “conscious influence” exerted by the biography of Jesus is that which we can understand by analogy with our own human experience. Inevitably, Schleiermacher makes the analogy to his own nineteenth century life and so the portrait of Jesus is conditioned and, to some extent limited, by Schleiermacher’s context.⁶⁶ Perhaps more significantly, Jesus becomes a kind of ‘everyman’, uniquely conscious of God and with a ‘specific dignity’ (*spezifische Dignität*)⁶⁷ but also the epitome of what it means to be human, the archetype which we are to follow. This approach has a particular effect on the interpretation of miracles, as we shall see. It also allows no room for a prophetic or even an unexpected reading of the life and ministry of Jesus: Jesus as the one who confronts, surprises and challenges us, rather than Jesus as the one who teaches, instructs and leads us.⁶⁸ Schleiermacher’s approach inclines him to concentrate on the ways in which Jesus is similar to us, rather than the ways that he might be different, either because he is divine or because he is an individual human being. This tendency is governed by more than a determination to describe Jesus as a believable human being, it is also shaped by a particular sense that Jesus is *the* human being.⁶⁹

Schleiermacher approaches the Gospel accounts of the miracles of Jesus with two questions: “How was this done?” and “Why was this done?” If credible answers can be given to both questions, then the account is particularly helpful and acceptable to us in building up a

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher, 1975:86–87 (Schleiermacher, 1864:92).

⁶⁶ Certain aspects of Jesus’ reported behaviour perplex him which people of a different time or culture might well not find worthy of comment. For instance, he is disturbed that Jesus is reported to have addressed inanimate matter (the wind and the waves) when he stilled the storm. See Schleiermacher, 1975:215–216, 218 (Schleiermacher, 1864:230–31, 234). Especially Schleiermacher, 1864:230, *da Elemente keine Ohren haben*.

⁶⁷ Schleiermacher, 1975:84 (Schleiermacher, 1864:89).

⁶⁸ It is partly this type of framework for Christology which Schweitzer so firmly rejects. See Schweitzer, 1954:398, “There was a danger that we should offer them a Jesus who was too small, because we had forced Him into conformity with our human standards and human psychology.”

⁶⁹ See Strauss, 1977:28–29.

picture of the historical Jesus; if only one can be answered satisfactorily, the account is still valuable, but if neither question can be answered the account becomes problematic. When it comes to considering how a miracle might have been done, Schleiermacher does not look for a complete explanation, but for an analogy to a known human ability.⁷⁰ Accounts of Jesus healing physical illnesses and mental distress, for instance, are taken to be analogous to the spiritual influence an exceptional individual can have on someone who is ill. If we know that an exceptional individual can communicate confidence and inspire a renewed sense of wellbeing, then we can believe that Jesus could do this in an intense and purified way with the most extraordinary results. This interpretation involves a particular understanding of 'the lordship of man's will', in the sense of a peculiarly strong faith in the power of the human mind.⁷¹

Schleiermacher offers only two categories of motive for performing a miracle: it is either done for a clear moral purpose or it is ostentatious and therefore completely unacceptable. The motive for healing miracles was easy to discern: they were works of compassion. The miracle of turning water into wine is acceptable to Schleiermacher, since he considers that increasing the conviviality of a social occasion is a sufficiently good reason for a miracle.⁷² The feeding of the five thousand, on the other hand, is more dubious because the means by which it might have been performed and its purpose remain obscure.⁷³ Schleiermacher's requirement that miracles should serve a moral purpose becomes, in effect, a utilitarian demand that miracles should do people good and not at all resemble showing off. The use of a miracle for revelation or even communication does not fall within the category of an acceptable moral purpose. A display of power is outlawed by

⁷⁰ Schleiermacher, 1975:216 (Schleiermacher, 1864:231), "Even if we assume that what distinguishes Christ from all other men involved the ability to do what other men cannot, we can only think of this analogically in the realm of human life (*doch nur analogisch vorstellen im Gebiet des menschlichen Lebens*)."

⁷¹ Strauss is one of the few writers who casts doubt on this; see Strauss, 1977:89. Renan puts it down to the excitable East, "Medicine was then in Judea what it still is in the East—in no respect scientific, but absolutely surrendered to individual inspiration." See Renan, 1927:151.

⁷² See Schleiermacher, 1975:220 (Schleiermacher, 1864:235).

⁷³ See Schleiermacher, 1975:214–15 (Schleiermacher, 1864:229–230).

definition.⁷⁴ One can see from these parameters that ‘nature miracles’ generally and walking on the water in particular, will present some interpretative challenges.

Schleiermacher gives a detailed discussion of a number of the miracles that he finds most difficult: the feeding of the five thousand, the stilling of the storm, the cursing of the fig tree, the coin in the fish’s mouth and the various accounts of Jesus raising the dead.⁷⁵ All of these raise troublesome questions about how the miracles were performed, and many seem to be lacking in moral purpose. When neither the question “How?” nor the question “Why?” can be answered satisfactorily, Schleiermacher concludes that the account itself is faulty:

However, when we look at another class of such acts, which do not lie within the human realm but were miracles performed on inanimate nature, we see that we can discover no analogy, and we think of them at the same time as more difficult to understand than the moral acts of Christ (*als sittliche Handlungen Christi zu begreifen*). Where elements of both are to be found we find ourselves greatly embarrassed (*größten Verlegenheit*), and this may go to the extent that we have to say: If the story is to be taken literally, it is incomprehensible (*so läßt sie sich nicht verstehen*). So the suspicion arises that the narrative is not of the sort that we can distinguish what is factual in it (*den Thatbestand* [present-day spelling, *Tatbestand*]).⁷⁶

Some stories of this type can be disregarded through a comparison of the different Gospels. Schleiermacher regards John’s Gospel as an eyewitness account, whereas the Synoptics contain only fragments of tradition.⁷⁷ Therefore if a story only appears in the Synoptics and not in John’s Gospel it is of a possibly dubious provenance and of lesser importance. This leaves Schleiermacher with the task of interpreting the feeding of the five thousand and the raising of Lazarus. He suggests that the feeding of the five thousand should be seen differently in the light of its presentation in John’s Gospel, because in the discourse which follows it Jesus makes it clear that it is not one of his signs.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Many other writers of the period find this concept difficult, e.g. “He came in the morning watch, far more to relieve from toil and protect from danger his worn-out and exposed disciples, than merely to show that the sovereignty over nature was in his hands.” Hanna, 1882:221.

⁷⁵ See Schleiermacher, 1975:213–221 (Schleiermacher, 1864:227–236).

⁷⁶ Schleiermacher, 1975:207 (Schleiermacher, 1864:221).

⁷⁷ See Schleiermacher, 1975:39 (Schleiermacher, 1864:40).

⁷⁸ See Schleiermacher’s comment on Jn 6:26, Schleiermacher, 1975:219 (Schleiermacher, 1864:234–5).

If it is not one of his signs, Schleiermacher argues, then it is not a miracle, and yet the story is told as if it were an inexplicable miracle; this underlines its unstable and unsatisfactory condition within the Jesus tradition and it becomes a story about which we cannot express a judgment.⁷⁹ His interpretation of the raising of Lazarus is particularly significant for understanding Schleiermacher's viewpoint on miracles. He points out that Jesus prays before calling Lazarus forth. This means that the miracle becomes an answered prayer rather than an inexplicable action. The notion that Jesus prayed with complete confidence is understandable by analogy to the more doubting way in which any believer might pray, therefore the power by which the miracle was performed is no longer a mystery. Here we see the clear evidence that Schleiermacher is not simply rationalising miracle accounts in the way that Paulus does: he can accept a supernatural action, provided that it is performed by God and not by Jesus. His problem is not that a show of supernatural power will rupture the grand unbroken harmony, but that a show of clearly supernatural power on the part of Jesus would shatter his human identity. Human will and human power are central to his Christology. Only a personality which can be understood can be imagined, and only a personality which can be imagined can have lasting influence. We can now begin to see why walking on the water hardly rates a discussion and attracts the description "pointless".⁸⁰

The miracle of walking on the water offers no analogy to a normal human power nor any obvious moral purpose according to Schleiermacher's terms. It is hard to argue that the disciples were in immediate need,⁸¹ or that their situation required relief by such an extravagant action. There is no human skill analogous to evading gravity.⁸² Worst of all, from Schleiermacher's point of view, the story appears in John's Gospel, a fact he omits to mention but which he could hardly have avoided if he had launched into a fuller discussion of the pericope. His only other comment apart from "pointless"⁸³ is to suggest

⁷⁹ For Strauss' scathing assessment of this interpretation, see Strauss, 1977:94.

⁸⁰ See Schleiermacher, 1975:220 (Schleiermacher, 1864:235).

⁸¹ Although some writers of this period have tried, see Hanna, 1882:221.

⁸² Even though some have done their best; see the more than dubious physics of Trench, 1850:285–286.

⁸³ See Schleiermacher, 1975:220 (Schleiermacher, 1864:235).

that, as the event is reported to have taken place in the darkness of the night, this would make observation uncertain.⁸⁴

In his discussion of miracles involving inanimate nature, Schleiermacher has revealed an interesting dimension to his critical responses: that of great embarrassment.⁸⁵ Since embarrassment is a social reaction which happens in front of other people (or in response to the imagined reaction of absent people), there must be a notional audience for Schleiermacher's work, before whom he feels not confident but vulnerable. Who is this audience? Why are these miracles so embarrassing? Is it because they threaten Schleiermacher's portrait of Jesus as an accessible yet ideal gentleman? Perhaps this is the only portrait of Jesus that Schleiermacher considers credible for modern people and if the sources themselves seem to undermine it, then the value of both the portrait and the sources is under threat. 'Man's will' lords it over Schleiermacher's work in two senses: the figure of Jesus must be totally comprehensible in human terms and the miracles of Jesus must demonstrably flow from heightened human powers. Schleiermacher's picture of what it means to be human dominates his Christology.

Trench and Westcott, on the other hand, do not find walking on the water an embarrassing miracle, perhaps partly because they find a way to interpret it in terms of the lordship of man's will. The significance of the miracle, they suggest, rests in the disclosure of a hitherto unknown human power. A human being, fully alive, would have dominion even over gravity. Jesus thus becomes our example, but not just for commendable behaviour in the here and now, but an eschatological promise foreshadowing future abilities. According to Westcott, this miracle depicts a moment when "that force which we regard as the most universal and the most constant, is made subservient to the control of human will."⁸⁶ The overcoming of gravity symbolizes the ultimate dominion over nature which will bring about the renewal of all things:

⁸⁴ See Schleiermacher, 1975:220 (Schleiermacher, 1864:235). This is one occasion where Strauss' barbed comment on Schleiermacher's exegesis is justified: "—his exegesis, as far as it pertains to the miraculous (*das Wunderhafte*) in Scripture, is distinguished from that of Paulus only by somewhat more spirit and subtlety (*mehr Geist und Feinheit*)."⁸⁵ Strauss, 1977:160 (Strauß, 1971:100).

⁸⁵ See Schleiermacher, 1975:207 (Schleiermacher, 1864:221), quoted above.

⁸⁶ Westcott, 1859:14.

The present laws of force and substance are once for all subjected to the Saviour, that we may look onwards in hope to the glories of a new heaven and a new earth.⁸⁷

In a description of three miracles of power (water into wine, the feeding of the five thousand and walking on the water) Westcott suggests that, even in this present life, there are glimpses of what will be:

And even now in the midst of our imperfect and inconstant struggles, the promises which shall one day be fully realized, find a partial accomplishment. The wine which flowed at Cana, flows still, as often as we welcome Christ as our guest. The bread which sustained the multitudes in the desert, the true bread, is offered to us by the very commandment of the Lord. The powers of nature yield to the heroic soul as often as it dares to be fearless.⁸⁸

Westcott does not specify in what way 'the powers of nature yield', but presumably he refers to heroic actions such as rescues which defy natural dangers like stormy seas. In these events the eschatological promise of a different future is made evident. The action of walking on the water has become heroic; it is the inspiration for defying the harsh cruelty of nature, and it is the foretaste of life in a new heaven and a new earth. Trench adds to this picture the suggestion that Adam and Eve would have been able to walk on water before the Fall:

It has already been observed that the miracle, according to its true idea, is not the violation, nor yet the suspension of law, but the incoming of a higher law, as of a spiritual in the midst of natural laws, and the momentary asserting for that higher law the predominance which it was intended to have, and but for man's fall it would always have had, over the lower; and with this a prophetic anticipation of the prevalence which it shall one day recover. Exactly thus was there here the sign of the lordship of man's will, when that will is in absolute harmony with God's will, over external nature. In regard of this very law of gravity, a feeble, and for the most part unconsciously possessed, remnant of his power survives to man in the well-attested fact that his body is lighter when he is awake than sleeping; from whence we conclude that the human consciousness, as an inner centre, works as an opposing force to the attraction of the earth and the centripetal force of gravity, however unable now to overbear it.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Westcott, 1859:31.

⁸⁸ Westcott, 1859:32.

⁸⁹ Trench, 1850:285-6.

Jesus walked on the water, not as a sign of his divinity, but a sign of his perfect manhood. As he walked by the perfected power of his human will, so we shall be changed and recover that perfect mastery of nature which was always our destiny, the lordship of man's will within the will of God.

The 'lordship of man's will' is important to the thinking of these nineteenth century writers. It speaks of the human potential to master the forces of nature. Some writers see this as manifesting itself in technological development, others in eschatological restoration, but both types of text indulge in an uncritical celebration of human power. Human nature has another important role in Schleiermacher's work: ideal human behaviour becomes the yardstick for judging the Jesus tradition. Accounts of miracles which seem not to be the actions of a gentleman and are not performed with a power analogous to a normal human ability are discounted from the tradition. Interestingly, though, within this human and psychological frame of reference there is also a tremendously high view of normal human ability: the power to heal illness through the influence of the mind is viewed as only an amplification of a recognisable human gift.

Schleiermacher, Trench and Westcott all see Jesus as an archetypal human being, but Trench and Westcott are content to think that human nature will be elevated to share in the miraculous abilities of Jesus;⁹⁰ Schleiermacher, on the other hand, is not convinced that there is anything noble about the unexplainable, and seeks to lower his portrait of Jesus so that it comes within the realm of recognisable human experience. Both approaches gain their energy from a vision of what it means to be human.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS FOR INTERPRETATION

These texts are a reminder that exegesis is not done in a cultural vacuum. When epistemological categories and even cultural preferences in a society undergo changes, then a moment comes when biblical

⁹⁰ It is interesting to compare Trench and Westcott with Augustine: he too focuses on the power of Jesus to walk on the water but takes this to be a prefiguring of the glory of Christ at the Parousia, not a sign that human beings will share this power. See *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Augustinus V Sermones*, Sermo LXXV, Caput VI.

stories "look different from what they did,"⁹¹ and this affects the work of theologians and biblical scholars, even when they are considering issues of history which, in theory, should be unaffected by changes in the culture of their own day.

All these writers felt themselves to be in an intellectual environment which had become hostile to the concept of miracles in general and particularly suspicious of miracle stories like walking on the water.⁹² It is important not to minimize the differences between their responses to this pressure, but there are, nevertheless, common themes which animate their work. The two highlighted here, 'the grand unbroken harmony' and 'the lordship of man's will', are dynamically related to one another. They could be seen as twin poles on a single axis; the idea that all knowledge is coherent and lends itself to explanation presupposes a powerfully perceptive human subject doing the explaining. This makes for a decidedly human-centred theory of the unity of everything: it is within the rational human mind that understanding dawns and progress in the mastery of the natural world is made. A mystery thus becomes something for solving, not contemplating. God himself becomes less dynamic and more ordered, obeying the laws of the universe which embody his true nature, rather than acting as an unpredictable free agent. One could say that God is presented as immanent rather than transcendent. When theology is framed in this way, there is less emphasis on encountering God and more emphasis on observing God at work through the regular patterns of the natural world.

It is possible to identify the vision of 'the grand unbroken harmony' and 'the lordship of man's will' because these ideas have become partially alien to us. We in the West no longer live in such an optimistic culture.⁹³ We no longer expect every area of human knowledge (philosophy, science, theology, history, etc.) to be integrated, not only because our education has become so specialised, but because we no longer have confidence in our ability to reach the idealised objective viewpoint from which the whole integrated pattern could be seen.⁹⁴ We are no longer

⁹¹ Mozley, 1865:1.

⁹² Sanday describes the situation as, "the haunting problem of Miracles." Sanday, 1907:203.

⁹³ The First World War, among other events, permanently altered this.

⁹⁴ Interestingly, even in Physics, the grandly named 'theory of everything' is not about linking every aspect of human knowledge, but rather reconciling gravity and quantum mechanics. Note Stephen Hawking's recent change of heart about whether 'the theory of everything' is itself achievable: "We are not angels who view the

so temperamentally averse to exceptions, singularities or anomalies because we live in a world of increasing complexity and diversity.⁹⁵ We are not nearly so confident that we could accurately detect a discord in the universe of harmony, so we are much more tolerant of ambiguity.⁹⁶ We are much more wary of unbridled human power, having heard the voices of the marginalised and exploited, and seen the increasing damage to the environment caused by unrestrained industrial development. In the light of these shifts in understanding and experience, the works of these nineteenth century writers can appear naïve and sometimes even a little pompous. But do these texts simply tell a cautionary tale about what happens when bias shapes interpretation, warning us not to be driven by our own prevailing cultural trends? What positive benefits do they offer in the development our own interpretation? There are two main advantages: some perspectives which help us to reflect critically on present-day methods, and some additional insights usually neglected in our own day.

The work of Paulus gives us an insight into the origins and preconceptions of rationalistic exegesis. Paulus's contorted explanations of pericopae have mostly faded from the critical canon without trace, but there are exceptions. In 1955, William Barclay revived the rationalist theory that the disciples did not actually see Jesus walking on the water; this is simply our mistaken interpretation.⁹⁷ In 1981, Derrett asserted that Jesus was standing on a known sandbank just under the surface of the lake.⁹⁸ Both offered these rationalising explanations in the teeth of the detailed and essentially unanswerable exegetical critique of this

universe from the outside. Instead, we and our models are both part of the universe we are describing. Thus a physical theory is self-referencing, like in Gödel's theorem [a mathematical theorem which results in a paradox]. One might therefore expect it to be either inconsistent, or incomplete." Quoted in Cornwell, 2004:5.

⁹⁵ This has given an opening for a theoretical discussion about exceptional events such as miracles in a way that would not have been culturally or theologically acceptable fifty years ago. See Meier, 1994:509–631.

⁹⁶ One of the interesting developments in systematic theology in the last thirty years or so has been the renaissance of work on the doctrine of the Trinity, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was sidelined as an unfruitful area. Could this be due to an increasing tolerance for ideas which resist formulaic explanation?

⁹⁷ See Barclay, 2001:242–245, originally published 1955, in which he is categorical that there is no miracle; and Barclay, 1958:115–119, where he suggests that whether or not this was a miracle is unimportant. In both texts, he appeals to Paulus' arguments about the translation of ἐπί. In discussing Mt 14:22–33, he carefully omits Peter's request and Jesus' reply (verses 28–29a).

⁹⁸ See Derrett, 1981:334, 344.

approach made by Strauss some hundred and twenty years before.⁹⁹ There is something about the implications felt to arise from this miracle that stimulates a rationalist revision. Writers such as Barclay, who would accept accounts of healing miracles as broadly historical, maintain a characteristically nineteenth-century sceptical reluctance to attribute the action of walking on the water to Jesus. Since they do not hold a thoroughly sceptical view of the supernatural, do they share something akin to Schleiermacher's scruples about the motive for this miracle?

Several twentieth century interpreters express a measure of difficulty or embarrassment in discussing this miracle and other 'nature miracles'.¹⁰⁰ For some, this is clearly a Schleiermacherian embarrassment over the motive for the performance of such an act. Meier, for instance, specifically excludes this miracle from the authentic acts of the historical Jesus because it does not involve the relief of human need and looks dangerously like self-glorification.¹⁰¹ This exactly replicates Schleiermacher's binary choice of motive for a miracle between moral purpose or ostentation. Meier's historical judgment is not necessarily incorrect, but this comparison with Schleiermacher does raise some questions about how he has arrived at his decision. He presents his argument as the logical result of the application of the objective criterion of coherence, but the wider perspective gained by reading Schleiermacher suggests this is not a complete description of the process. Meier, like Schleiermacher, seems to struggle to see walking on the water as a noble act, worthy of Jesus of Nazareth. Meier's assertion that all authentic miracle accounts are 'other-orientated' reveals his own expectation that all true miracles of Jesus will be orientated to human needs. Schleiermacher developed this same utilitarian and humanitarian understanding of miracles in order to rescue the figure of Jesus from a type of quasi-divine unreality; for Schleiermacher, the actions of Jesus must be analogous to the actions of other good men, otherwise Jesus would become unimaginable and therefore unbelievable. Does the fact that Meier is also engaged in a quest for the historical Jesus make him liable to experience the same restraints on his imagination?

⁹⁹ Strauss' work was surely known to both.

¹⁰⁰ On nature miracles in general, Stanton, 2001:67, "The seven so-called nature miracles raise more acute problems than the healings and exorcisms." See also Neil, 1956:369–72, where the nature miracles are described as posing 'expository problems'.

¹⁰¹ See Meier, 1994:920.

Logically, it must be possible to construe the motive for this miracle as something other than ostentation, but does the desire to present a credible historical portrait of Jesus bias the commentator against an action that is mysterious and unexplained? In interpreting miracles like walking on the water, perhaps the quest for the historical Jesus has not strayed so far from its nineteenth-century roots.

The work of Strauss also casts a long shadow. While his philosophical preconceptions and conclusions are now largely ignored, the insights on which his exegetical work was based live on. His assertion that Gospel pericopae were something other than true or false history, that they were myths conveying ideas, made it possible to examine the texts in a new light. It contributed to what would become source, form and even redaction critical work as scholars examined the history of the texts as literary products. While few critics would now accept his wholesale designation of Gospel pericopae as myths, many would rely on the insight that Gospel accounts are carefully crafted stories, created to convey a particular message and shaped in relationship to a number of contemporary religious and cultural influences. Indeed, historical critical work on a pericope which ignored questions of possible sources or influences would now be considered inadequate, whatever the critic's verdict on the historicity of the event described. This is Strauss' legacy to New Testament Studies.

On Mt 14:22–33 in particular, his exegetical work was prescient: he sketches out a number of suggestions for the origin of the pericope which foreshadow most present-day interpretations. For instance, he suggests that Old Testament narratives and imagery (e.g. Exodus 14:19–22 and Job 9:8) could have inspired the early Christian community to attribute this power to Jesus.¹⁰² Heil's interpretation of the three gospel accounts of walking on the water is based on establishing just this connection,¹⁰³ and his work is taken up by Davies and Allison¹⁰⁴ and Meier.¹⁰⁵ Strauss also mentions that the sea is a Jewish symbol for chaos and hostile forces, and that this may suggest that the story is intended to be an allegory of Christ rescuing his church from danger, with the story of Peter as an additional admonition for the disciple to keep his

¹⁰² See Strauss, 1973:502.

¹⁰³ See Heil, 1981.

¹⁰⁴ See Davies and Allison, 1991:510.

¹⁰⁵ See Meier, 1994:291.

or her eyes upon Jesus.¹⁰⁶ This interpretation is taken up by a number of twentieth-century commentators, including Fenton,¹⁰⁷ Held¹⁰⁸ and Gundry.¹⁰⁹ Strauss also comments on the number of hellenistic texts which refer to a similar miraculous power,¹¹⁰ a fact which is noted as a possible influence by Luz.¹¹¹ Strauss then comments in detail on the possible link between Mt 14:22-33 and John 21:1-14.¹¹² He concludes that the myth of walking on the water is an earlier stage in the tradition than the meeting at the shore, but nevertheless his discussion foreshadows Maddon's work, whose argument that the story of walking on the water is a misplaced resurrection account is partly based on a comparison of these two passages.¹¹³

Strauss argued that his designation of Gospel stories as myths was only a more honest version of what every preacher did when they told a Gospel story and then drew a moral from it.¹¹⁴ Sermons move from specific details to abstract concepts, from the particular to the general. Perhaps Strauss' exegetical work is only a more honest version of what every scholar now does in interpreting this story; perhaps we are all neo-Straussian now. However, there is an irony here: Strauss' intention was to remove faith from the realm of history altogether and relocate it in the purer domain of philosophy, not to provide a reason for doing endless historical critical work. For Strauss, examining the literary qualities of a pericope was not an end in itself, it was only the first stage in demonstrating that the Gospels were not to be treated as history but as primitive embodiments of complex and eternal ideas.¹¹⁵ Strauss did have a particularly limited view of what constitutes reliable history: an account was either an unadorned eyewitness report or it was a myth. He had no concept that tradition could influence the telling of an essentially true story, so if he could detect elements of tradition in an account then it could be discounted as history automatically. Many present-day scholars who tacitly accept Strauss' ideas about the literary

¹⁰⁶ See Strauss, 1973:502.

¹⁰⁷ See Fenton, 1980:244.

¹⁰⁸ See Held, Held in Bornkamm, Barth and Held, 1960:195.

¹⁰⁹ See Gundry, 1982:300.

¹¹⁰ See Strauss, 1973:502.

¹¹¹ See Luz, 1990:407.

¹¹² See Strauss, 1973:502.

¹¹³ See Maddon, 1997.

¹¹⁴ See Strauss, 1973:784.

¹¹⁵ See Strauss, 1973:39.

texture of Gospel pericopae do not accept this historical stringency. For Strauss, ‘myth’ and ‘history’ were exclusive categories and the critic had to make a binary choice between them; many present-day critics now consider such a choice unnecessary, since an account can contain both traditional and historical elements.¹¹⁶ However, the question of how history is to be discerned still arises. Sometimes we seem to have made the tracing of sources and influences into a self-sufficient activity, divorced from questions of historicity all together.¹¹⁷ It is one thing to affirm, with Davies and Allison, that the issue of whether Jesus did walk on the water or not cannot be settled,¹¹⁸ it is quite another to do detailed critical work and not even ask the question.¹¹⁹

Strauss drew such clear and far-reaching historical conclusions because he based them, not only on his critical work, but on his prior philosophical understanding that miracles cannot happen. He was quite open about his philosophical and theological commitments, and used them alongside his text critical skills to reach historical judgments. Has the critical task really changed that much? On a brief anecdote such as walking on the water, how could a decision about its historicity be made other than on a conviction about whether such an event is likely to happen?¹²⁰ This conviction will inevitably be informed by the philosophical, theological and cultural understanding which we bring to the text. Meier roundly asserts that,

—these wide-ranging questions are legitimate in the arena of philosophy or theology, but they are illegitimate...in a historical investigation.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Interestingly, Schleiermacher already had this more nuanced view of Gospel stories. See Schleiermacher, 1975:39 (Schleiermacher, 1864:40).

¹¹⁷ See Heil, 1981, where the question of whether Jesus actually walked on the water is never raised.

¹¹⁸ See Davies and Allison, 1991:499–500.

¹¹⁹ See Ashton’s comment on narrative criticism of the Gospels: “By plumping for intratextuality and thus refusing to consider any possible reference to a world outside or beyond the text, narrative critics spare themselves the obligation of answering awkward questions concerning the historicity of the events recorded in the Gospel [of John] and the accuracy of the words assigned to Jesus.” Ashton, 1994:163. There has also been a trend for commending social-scientific work because it is disengaged from “ontological questions”, see Esler, 1995:4; also Best, 1983:183; Scroggs, 1980:167; Malina, 1982:238.

¹²⁰ See the discussion in *Chapter Two on the scarcity of historical evidence for evaluating a single pericope*, pp. 30–31.

¹²¹ Meier, 1994:511.

Yet his historical judgment about walking on the water closely resembles a combination of the thoughts of Schleiermacher and Strauss, thoughts which originate in philosophical and theological values. Perhaps we have something to learn from these nineteenth century writers who were much more willing to discuss theology and philosophy alongside biblical exegesis. They did not assume that they could make adequate historical judgments without reference to these larger questions; perhaps we should be as transparent. Being open about this process would not resemble the confessional disclosure some scholars now make¹²² (which can sound like simply an intellectual disclaimer of responsibility) but would be a rather more ambitious engagement with an attempt to understand the world. The larger theological and philosophical ideas which guide us should be open to critical appreciation and scrutiny alongside the historical arguments which we construct from the evidence of the text. Rational enquiry is not limited to assessing the accuracy of the details of an argument but can encompass a discussion of the adequacy of its premises. If these wider issues play such a large part in the decisions that we make when interpreting a text, they should not be banished to the margins of the discussion as if they were irrelevant or somehow shameful. Perhaps, through a process of scholarly collaboration, they could be once more an active part of our critical discussions, open to scrutiny and creative development.

When Mozley criticised sceptics such as Strauss, he made this observation:

Reason does not always prevail spontaneously and without effort even in questions of belief; so far from it, that the question of faith against reason may often be more properly termed the question of reason against imagination.¹²³

Mozley was implying that the rational understanding of miracle accounts might be counter-intuitive and counter-cultural; in other words, it might be rational to believe that these events happened, how ever hard it was to imagine that they had. He is, in effect, describing scepticism as a failure of the imagination. This does accord with Strauss' own comment that believing miracles to be historical events is not so much irrational as trying to make "the inconceivable, conceivable",

¹²² As Meier himself makes, Meier, 1991:6, "I must candidly confess that I work out of a Catholic context."

¹²³ Mozley, 1865:93.

(*das Undenkbare denkbar zu machen*).¹²⁴ What would happen, then, if a critic were to take Mozley's challenge to heart by trying to overcome the restrictions of a modern western imagination?

It is possible to interpret Mt 14:22–33 as a singular story describing a dynamic encounter between Jesus, Peter and the disciples. Perhaps the restricted range of motives previously attributed to Jesus can be widened: perhaps Jesus walked on the water in celebration of a oneness with nature, rather than to demonstrate dominion over it. Perhaps both Jesus and Peter act with more joyful spontaneity than the rather ponderous allegorical interpretations, ancient and modern, would suggest. Perhaps there is value in the anthropology of Westcott and Trench, and we should think of walking on the water as an expression of human innocence and a foretaste of human perfection. Perhaps the very peculiarity of the story and its lack of obvious humanitarian motive can become the starting point of Christological reflection rather than its stumbling block.

Examining these nineteenth-century 'effects' of Mt 14:22–33 and wider discussions of the nature of miracles has yielded a number of interpretative benefits. The origins of some present-day interpretations have become clearer through analysing their predecessors. The issue of philosophical and theological commitments has been raised, and the possible advantage of raising these overtly in critical discussions has been considered. The key role which imagination plays in interpretation has been highlighted.

Westcott suggests that, "—all the miracles of power are alike unimaginable and silent."¹²⁵ Perhaps where words fail, the images in the following chapter can evoke this story.

¹²⁴ Strauss, 1973:li; Strauss, 1837:x.

¹²⁵ Westcott, 1859:15.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOME VISUAL 'EFFECTS' OF MT 14:22–33

INTRODUCTION

It is unusual for a project on a New Testament passage to contain a chapter which reflects on its depiction in works of art. Such a reflection takes us not only into the wider *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, but over the boundaries of Biblical Studies and into the foreign land of another discipline—the History of Art. If this journey is to be fruitful, it has to fulfill a more ambitious purpose than a kind of academic tourism, where the traveller returns with an album of images but little interest in their origins or significance. The issue of respecting historical distance and context applies to 'effects' as well as to biblical texts. Only by first using appropriate analytical tools to examine the 'effect' can the 'effect' and the text be brought into a meaningful comparison by the present-day interpreter.

Such a study as this immediately raises the question of the nature of the hermeneutical relationship between a text and an image. Those who compare images only with images or texts only with texts do not encounter this question; but once the critic crosses the border into a different medium, certain hermeneutical questions become pressing; for instance, are some of the characteristics of these works of art governed by the possibilities and limits of the medium, not just the interpretative choices of the artist? Do the inherent differences between images and texts offer us a new opportunity for insight into this passage?

A failure even to acknowledge these questions would result in treating the works of art as honorary texts, which would be a profound discourtesy as well as a failure of critical appreciation. The same narrative can be conveyed in a painting, a film, a short story or a song, for instance, but this does not mean that the different depictions of the narrative are simply interchangeable. In his work on a general theory of narrative, Seymour Chatman is quick to point out that although narrative is trans-medial, the particular narrative techniques of different media

are not simply equivalent.¹ This is because the creative properties of each medium differ, and so it follows that the story must be told in a different way in a different medium. What are some of the particular qualities of narrative in a work of art?

THE QUALITIES OF NARRATIVE IN A WORK OF ART

One difference between a painting or sculpture and a text is the potential lack of sequential story-telling. If a single image is used to depict a story, then the story is not presented as a sequence of events with a beginning and an end.² How then is it presented? How is it recognisably the same story? Does it encapsulate the story in some way, or merely act as an aide-memoire to the written story? This issue is discussed in an influential eighteenth century work by a writer more well-known to biblical scholars as a theologian, Gotthold Lessing. Lessing suggests that the task of an artist depicting a story is to choose the quintessential moment in the narrative, the moment which is, “—the most suggestive one, and from which the preceeding and succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible.”³ Yet how can one moment capture the whole?

Lessing’s argument in *Laocoon: an essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* is based on asserting a strong dichotomy between time and space. The unfolding of events in time is the particular strength of a poem, he suggests, but the depiction of events in space is the particular quality of a work of art.⁴ This separation, although helpful, is made too

¹ He comments, for instance, that the terms ‘flashback’ and ‘flashforward’ apply to a cinematic technique and should not be used loosely to describe the return to an earlier or later episode in a novel, as this obscures the particular features of prose style. See Chatman, 1978:64.

² Such visual sequencing is, of course, possible to achieve e.g. in a sequence of frescoes or cartoon frames. What interests me here is how art can dispense with this sequence and yet still depict a narrative in a single image. This issue is particularly relevant to the artefacts considered in this chapter.

³ Lessing, 1962:78. (Chapter 16). Originally published 1766. “—den prägnantesten wählen, aus welchem das Vorhergehende und Folgende am begreiflichsten wird.” (Lessing, 1990:117).

⁴ E.g. “Objects which exist side by side, or whose parts so exist, are called bodies. Consequently bodies with their visible properties are the peculiar subjects of painting. Objects which succeed each other in time are actions. Consequently actions are the peculiar subjects of poetry.” Lessing, 1874:91. (Chapter 16).

sharply:⁵ it takes time to observe the different areas of an image, after all, and so it is not a timeless or instantaneous object. Moreover, as soon as the observer begins to describe a work of art—begins to tell a story about what is depicted there—then a sequence reasserts itself in the description. It is also true that a written description may powerfully evoke a physical setting or landscape and so is not divorced entirely from the depiction of physical space.⁶

Nevertheless, there is a particular quality to the nature of time in a work of art; a painting or a sculpture does hold a particular moment before the viewer's eyes, and it does so perpetually. The issue is not whether the image depicts a frozen instant, like a photograph, or a more complex representation of time,⁷ but the fact that what is depicted has a sustained immediacy for the viewer. Perhaps the most striking feature of time in narrative works of art is this eternal 'now'; there are no past or future tenses, the moment is presented to the viewer with an immediacy and presence which a text cannot achieve, precisely because it does describe events in sequence, using past, present or future tenses. Visual depictions of the Last Judgment or the Garden of Eden confront the viewer in the here and now. This is why works of art are rarely simply didactic or instructive but offer a kind of iconic encounter with the narrative, a moment of presentation.⁸ This effect is sometimes heightened by the gaze of any figures within the image.⁹

⁵ See Stafford's comment, "What Lessing and his followers never understood was that the expressive spatial arts are not exclusively spatial. In fact, they prod viewers to experience time by inviting us to engage in the construction or deconstruction of the image." Stafford, 1996:32. Also Klee, 1968:184, "In Lessing's *Laocoön*, on which we squandered study time when we were young, much fuss is made about the difference between temporal and spatial art. Yet looking into the matter more closely, we find all this is but a scholastic delusion. For space, too, is a temporal concept."

⁶ See e.g. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë, 1981.

⁷ See discussion on continuous narrative (the depiction of several different episodes involving the same character in a single space or setting) in Andrews, 1998.

⁸ Although Bainton's comment on the intention behind the use of images may be broadly correct, "—the West was didactic, the East sacramental," (Bainton, 1974:25), I would argue that the effect of being in the presence of a narrative image is always different from reading or hearing a narrative text and often verges on the iconic, regardless of whether or not this was the intention.

⁹ E.g. Preti's *Pilate washing his hands* (1663), where Pilate's gaze seems to challenge the viewer. See also Gombrich's comment on the cliché that 'the eyes follow you around the room'—he suggests that, in the absence of another specific focus, the viewer will always feel that the figure's eyes are on them—it is perhaps less a tribute to artistic skill and more a comment on the psychological power of facial body language. See Gombrich, 1977:234.

These two characteristics of narrative in a work of art—the eternal ‘now’ and the sense of encounter, are illustrated in a particularly poignant episode in the life of the medieval mystic Margery Kempe:

There [in the Church] I saw a *Pietá*, a statue of our Lady bearing her dead son across her lap. And as I gazed at this *Pietá*, I was flooded with thoughts of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. I felt at one with our Lady, Saint Mary, and her sufferings; I knew how bitterly she would have wept, how loud she must have cried, so loudly that she might have died. Then the priest of the lady I was to meet came to me and said, “Woman, Jesus died a very long time ago.”

It took me some time to compose myself. And then I answered, “Sir, his dying is as present to me now as if it were this very morning that he died.”¹⁰

A narrative work of art is a kind of meditation on a story. It lends itself to being not just an illustration of the written narrative but a focus for devotion, a way for the viewer to connect with elements of the story intellectually and emotionally, in such a way that they make a personal response. In fact, eliciting the response may become a more significant motive for the artist than encapsulating the narrative. The image may be a composite scene, for instance, encompassing characters who never appear together in a Gospel pericope. It may invite a theological meditation on a theme rather more than an imaginative reconstruction of a certain narrative. Such images are normally classified by art historians as ‘devotional’, as opposed to ‘narrative.’¹¹ This separation, however, masks something essential to devotional works of art: they are still rooted in narrative. Images of the wounds of Christ rely on the narrative of the crucifixion just as much as on a particular theological understanding of its significance. Images such as the *Pietà* or the *Madonna and Child* are similarly rooted in the Gospels, even though they do not reflect a particular pericope. Scenes such as the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi, the Last Supper and the Crucifixion do refer directly to Gospel pericopae, yet are often rightly identified as devotional art, since they also contain symbols of a rich theological and devotional tradition. Witness Neil Macgregor’s comment on Jan Gossaert’s *The Adoration of the Kings* (c. 1500–15):

¹⁰ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Ch. 60. See edition translated by John Skinner, 1998.

¹¹ E.g. See Rhodes, 1995:141,145, who describes ‘the practice of the devotional present’ and describes the *imago pietatis* as “—chronologically ambiguous.”

Gossaert's picture does not show us the birth of Christ: it paints a meditation on the meaning of the birth of Christ and why it matters to us now.¹²

In the creation of these images, both the detail of the story and the theological or liturgical significance attributed to it are woven together. Some works stay closer to the narrative flow of the text and, in Lessing's terms, invite us to imagine the moment which precedes and that which follows the image, so that the whole narrative is poised in the moment illustrated; others freeze the flow of narrative events and invite us to step aside into the stillness of devotion and theological reflection. Both types of images are part of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text like Mt 14:22–33 and offer the possibility of exploring the riches of the narrative itself and disclosing the theological themes within which it has been understood.

In the absence of words, the narrative is conveyed not only with different techniques but also with different priorities and a different type of clarity. The very aspects of a story which are precise in a text are ambiguous in a work of art, and vice versa. For instance, a text is precise in reporting dialogue and sometimes thoughts and motivations, but a work of art must suggest these through facial expressions and body language, the relative position of figures, and so on. A text is often silent about the visual details of a story, leaving them to the reader's imagination; but a figure in a painting, for instance, has to be clothed or naked and, if clothed, the fabric has to have a certain colour, shape and texture—these details cannot be left aside entirely in the same way that they can be in a text—even if the artist partly obscures them by shadow or distance or a particular technique of expression.¹³

In depictions of the story of walking on the water, questions arise about the physical appearance of Jesus and Peter, for instance, questions which are not answered in the text. In fact, they are not simply unanswered but generally unasked by the reader; the written text is complete without these physical details, the image is not. A number of the ambiguities of the written text are therefore resolved when it is depicted. For instance, the landscape (and seascape) in which Mt 14:22–33 occurs must be conveyed, and in its depiction lie interpretative

¹² Macgregor, 2000:13.

¹³ The impact also changes with the style of the clothes, the scenery etc.—e.g. whether it is contemporary with the artist, Middle Eastern or following some other convention. Eg. consider the impact of Stanley Spencer's *Christ carrying the Cross*.

choices about the degree of danger the disciples faced, the distance that Peter walked, and so on. Decisions are taken about the specific moment and viewpoint depicted; also about the way in which the miraculous power of Jesus is conveyed: does he appear God-like or similar to Peter?

The relationship between Jesus and Peter and the rest of the disciples is elucidated in the positions of the figures and their facial expressions. It is this relationship that is ambiguous in the written text, leaving open questions as to whether Peter is the good or the feckless disciple. Do the works of those who have struggled to make this story visually present to us offer a new (non-verbal) way of understanding these relationships? Their answers to these interpretive questions cannot be definitive, but then neither can any other conclusion which goes beyond the detail of the text, even if it is made in an analytical and historical study.¹⁴ A written analysis of the text will often only address one or two of the issues mentioned above, but it is the nature of an image, particularly a figurative image, that it must offer decisions on many of these issues in order to encapsulate the narrative.

Interestingly, the powerful effect of these additional specific details is often not lessened but rather heightened by the absence of another element: the dialogue. The gestures of the figures in a great painting, for instance, do not resemble a game of charades, where a desperate dumb-play is substituted for words; it is rather that the gestures are so finely chosen that they render words superfluous. The power of a narrative conveyed without dialogue or narration is amply illustrated by works such as Giotto's *The Kiss of Judas* (1304–6) or Masaccio's *The Expulsion from Paradise* (1426–7). Facial expressions, body language, the relative position of the figures, and, indeed, the whole composition of each fresco not only conveys the narrative events but offers a meditation on how it might have been, on how it might have felt, and indeed, on how it feels, since the paintings present an eternal 'now'.¹⁵ The realization of these stories in representations of physical space and flesh and

¹⁴ For instance, Held's assertion that the essence of the narrative is Peter illustrating what it is to be a disciple "—auf dem Weg der Nachfolge." See Held in Bornkamm, Barth and Held, 1960:195.

¹⁵ But it is true that these pictures belong to particular periods of fresco painting, and at other periods there has been less interest in this kind of psychological realism and drama. Nevertheless, they illustrate one aspect of what is possible through a visual narrative.

blood invite us to connect with the biblical narrative in a way that a written text cannot. They are, in a sense, incarnated.

The very change of medium from text to image offers the freedom to recreate a narrative. An image of walking on the water thus becomes a version of this narrative in its own right, with its own priorities. The difference between a narrative told in a text and a narrative shown in a work of art creates a level of hermeneutic friction which can be beneficial in arriving at a fuller interpretation of the story. As Mitchell asserts, the question is not whether there are similarities and differences between texts and images, but what difference these similarities and differences make.¹⁶ Images provide a very particular kind of presentation which addresses the difficulties of the narrative by a different route and sometimes appropriates the story for quite new purposes. Images both offer answers to existing questions and create new ones.

Literary examinations of Gospel pericopae discuss the structure and artistry evident in the narrative. One criticism that can be levelled at them is that they are so focussed in the text that they lack an appropriate sense of historical distance. Studying a range of visual artefacts from different periods can restore a sense of distance through observation of the unfamiliar, while giving further opportunities for considering the narrative structure. In this way it can supplement a literary critical investigation. Studying artefacts which display theological themes in conjunction with the narrative gives a reminder of the life of these narratives within confessing communities. The work of art is a distilled meditation on the meaning of the story. It provides a visually immediate encounter with the narrative which both takes us into what the artist¹⁷ perceives as the essence of the story and invites us to relate to it.

Each of the following artefacts will be considered in detail, according to some methods of formal analysis. This will include taking into account factors like the materials used, the size and condition of the work, the use of colour, light, line, texture, depth, symmetry, space, and so on; according to what is appropriate to the particular image. To ignore these features would be to ignore how the artefact itself communicates the narrative non-verbally; this would amount to treating the image as a theological illustration entirely dependent on the

¹⁶ See Mitchell, 1994:91.

¹⁷ Including the artist's community, both artistic, cultural and theological. Expressing idiosyncratic interpretations is a more modern phenomenon.

text, rather than as a distinct work of art, dynamically and creatively related to the text.¹⁸

At the same time, it is important to consider each artefact in the light of the prevailing artistic styles in the period in which it was produced, and to consider any indications of the context and purpose for which it was intended. There may also be an indication of the theological themes which have become associated with the narrative within a particular period. We have seen that one of Gadamer's aims in using the term 'horizon' is to preserve historical distance and difference, not to minimize it.¹⁹ The very term *Wirkungsgeschichte* implies an historical awareness. An ahistorical description of an artefact would tend not to disclose adequately the ways in which it is alien to us as present-day interpreters and viewers. This would, in turn, rob us of the main benefit of examining the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text: the discovery of fresh interpretive insights which both supplement and challenge our present-day interpretations.

Each work of art will be considered as an 'effect' of the text, an instance of the act of interpreting the story, even if not the actual text.²⁰ There will be no attempt to rationalise them into a single evolutionary story of the depiction of this pericope, since their relationship with the text is more akin to satellites in orbit around a planet than progressive generations of ancestors proceeding from a genetic prototype. There are relationships and affinities between certain groups of images, but there are also cavernous historical and cultural divides. The only firm point of contact between all these artefacts is that they are interpreta-

¹⁸ See John Drury's description of his approach to interpreting what he calls "Christian pictures"—he commits himself to examining the composition, colours, details and paint techniques of each picture, rather than simply isolating certain symbols or motifs for comment. Drury, 1999:ix. See also Adams and Apostolos-Cappadona, 1987:4, "—works of art are in their own right a mode of human expression that generates theological interpretation and reflection."

¹⁹ See discussion in Chapter One.

²⁰ Scholars dispute whether the Dura Europus frescoes, for instance, show attention to textual details. Against this kind of approach being characteristic of early Christian art, see Grabar, 1969:58; and for, see Kraeling, 1967:58. Christina Saj comments, "Although I do not closely examine scripture in the studio, it no doubt informs the work." [personal E-mail]. It is worth remembering that these narratives were oral stories before they were ever texts and they arguably live on most powerfully in a post-textual form: in memories, sermons, artefacts, etc. See Brueggemann's comment on the Prophets, Brueggemann, 2000:1, "Rather, the force of these texts... is through ad hoc use, utterance out of dense memory long schooled in the text." If this is where Scripture lives, it needs to be examined here as well as on the page.

tions and appropriations of this narrative. Comparisons are possible, but a single account in which each image is an episode is not.

The works discussed here do not represent a comprehensive history of the visual depictions of this pericope. For instance, no images from illuminated manuscripts have been included because it would not be possible to cover this area adequately in a project of this size. There is no detailed discussion of nineteenth and twentieth century book illustrations or twentieth century cartoons for the same reason. Some images have been chosen as representative of a wider range of works; for instance, the *Navicella* was reproduced in many different settings and media and so it is discussed here because it is the origin of a significant visual tradition. The Dura fresco is included because it was painted so early in the history of the Church and the Saj painting because it is a significant work belonging to the present day. In total, the works discussed in this chapter offer a range of different depictions of Mt 14:22–33 which raise a fruitful range of interpretative questions.

Examining these 'translations' of the narrative from text to image will highlight some different questions with which to return to the text. These may concern the structure and the impact of the narrative itself, such as: what is the key moment in this story according to this interpretation? How does this connect with my reading of the text? Does my interpretation change if I adopt the artist's point of view? Would this enrich or diminish my understanding of the text?

On the other hand, an image can also raise questions about how the narrative has been understood or appropriated in different periods and contexts. This would involve any theological, liturgical or sacramental associations evident in the image, or in its intended or subsequent usage, in so far as these can be understood. In both of these areas, examining the visual *Wirkungsgeschichte* may be helpful because it offers new insights, or because it brings to light my own preunderstanding: it may provide stimulating encouragement or an abrasive challenge, in either case it can enrich and inform interpretation.

A FRESCO AT DURA EUROPOS (c. 232?–256? CE)

Historical and Geographical Context

The city of Dura Europus is set on a plateau above the Euphrates. It is surrounded on the north and south sides by ravines and on the west by desert. It was founded circa 300 BCE as a hellenistic fortress city

and its strategic border position meant that it passed through successive periods of Parthian and Roman rule before finally falling to the Sasanians in circa 256 CE.²¹ After this defeat, the city was never restored for habitation, but instead gradually slipped under successive layers of desert sand and lay undiscovered until the early twentieth century.

Although some earthworks were erected along the inside walls of buildings in the city during the final siege, they failed to keep the Sasanians out. Yet they did perform a vital conservation role. Behind the mounds of earth were the earliest frescoes that have ever been discovered in a Christian building for worship. Although damaged, one of them clearly depicts Jesus and Peter walking on the water.²² There was also a frescoed synagogue and a Mithraeum in the same area. The excavations of the site were done jointly by the French Academy and Yale University between 1928–37. The frescoes from the Christian Building were removed from the site and taken to the Yale Collection, where they were originally on show in a reconstructed Baptistry Room, but are now in storage.

The Physical Context within the Building

The Christian building itself resembles a wealthy family dwelling of the time and setting, with rooms grouped around a courtyard. Several significant changes had been made, however, which suggest that it was no longer used as a dwelling: two rooms have been knocked into one, possibly to make a large meeting room and the building no longer had latrines or a cooking area.²³ The frescoes were found in a smaller room which contained a rectangular baptistry under a curved arch. The room measures approximately 6.8m by 3.15m. The fresco of walking on the water was originally approximately 1.12m high by 1m wide. The room contained five other identifiable frescoes: the Good Shepherd (with the later addition of the figures of Adam and Eve), the Samaritan woman at the well, the healing of the paralytic, the women visiting the tomb, and David and Goliath (with their names written beside the figures). There was a further fresco which disintegrated beyond recognition

²¹ This date is established by the coins found beside the skeletons of those who perished in a tunnel under the city. See Matheson, 1982:36. There is an earlier date (232 CE) for some of the work done on the Christian Building, inscribed in a layer of wet plaster in room B. See Kraeling, 1967:89.

²² See Illustration 1.

²³ See Kraeling, 1967:155.

shortly after it was uncovered, but is described in the original excavation reports as depicting a garden, possibly paradise. Perhaps a dozen other images which covered the walls have been lost completely.

Grabar suggests that these frescoes are individual scenes of salvation, and contrasts them sharply with the images in the synagogue at Dura, which he describes as concerned with the stories of the whole people of Israel.²⁴ This is a hard distinction to maintain since several of the scenes in the Christian Building show groups (several sheep around the Good Shepherd, several disciples in the boat, several women travelling to the tomb), and some images in the Synagogue depict individuals, (e.g. the binding of Isaac). Of course, some 'individual' scenes like these have collective theological significance for the whole people of Israel; but this would apply equally to images such as David and Goliath in the Christian building. It is, in any case, difficult to suggest what 'individual salvation' might mean at this period: there was obviously a personal choice involved in being baptised into an illegal cult, but it was an initiation into a group with a common bond of tradition and self-understanding expressed liturgically and pictorially. The few extant Syriac texts on baptism point to a rich theological and symbolic tradition at this time.²⁵ To enter the baptistry room at Dura was to see a many-faceted presentation which surely did much more than offer a way of being individually and repeatedly reassured of God's saving power. The sum total of the woven narrative of the frescoes, illusive as it may be, is more than the message that God saves those who are in need.

The Baptistry as a Liturgical Space

There are no texts on baptism which can be linked definitively with Dura, either chronologically or geographically. There is also no book of rubrics to indicate precisely how the rite of baptism was conducted in the churches of this area at this period. There are a number of texts, however—lectures, hymns, instructions on church order—which originate in this part of the world within one or two centuries of the time that the baptistry at Dura was in use and which contain extensive

²⁴ See Grabar, 1969:96.

²⁵ E.g. see the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, (early 3rd century), Aphrahat's *Demonstrationes* (c. 337–345 CE), Ephraim's *Hymns on the Feast of the Epiphany* (c. 350 CE), Narsai's *Liturgical Homilies* (450–470 CE), the Syriac *Acts of Thomas* (c. 225 CE) and Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Discourses* (c. 348 CE). See Bibliography for editions and translations consulted.

discussions of baptismal theology and practice. These texts do have common features and do differ significantly from western traditions; this means that, at the very least, they provide a corrective which can bring our own hidden western assumptions about the symbolism of baptism to light. At the best, they could offer some insights into how the frescoed room was used liturgically, and so under what conditions the image of walking on the water was originally viewed.²⁶

These texts convey a sense of the gravity and privilege of being baptised. Cyril of Jerusalem's catechetical discourses imply a lengthy period of instruction,²⁷ and several of the texts mention a number of rituals connected with baptism. These include the use of different rooms for different stages in the rite,²⁸ disrobing and then being clothed in a white robe after baptism,²⁹ and the liberal anointing of the candidate with chrism, either before or after baptism, or both.³⁰

The theological ideas expressed are focussed on the incarnation and have a mystical and sacramental quality to them. For instance, the water itself has been sanctified because Christ submitted himself to be baptised in ordinary water; this means that it is now sanctified with the power to give life, it has become holy, tranquil and pleasant, and it is a womb from which one can be born.³¹ Water not only cleanses the candidates, but clothes them.³² There is mention of dying and rising, but it is not in the western form of 'dying to sin, rising to Christ'³³ (suggesting primarily, perhaps, a radical change of allegiance), but rather a sacramental identification with Christ's experience: the baptismal laver becomes the sepulchre and the candidate is stripped as Jesus was stripped to be

²⁶ Some confidence might be placed in the relatively constant and faithful form of eastern rites, given that parts of Ephraim's *Hymns on the Feast of Epiphany* are still in use in the Orthodox baptismal liturgy today. See introduction to the hymns in *A select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 13.

²⁷ See *Precatechesis*, 4.

²⁸ E.g. see Cyril's *Mystagogical Catechesis I*, *On the rites before Baptism*, 4–8.

²⁹ See Ephraim's *Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany*, 6:15, 6:18, 9:13.

³⁰ See particularly *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 16:10–11, which suggests that anointing was so extensive that it would be better for a woman deacon to anoint the women. Also *Acts of Thomas*, 121 and 157, where a long prayer is said over the oil, and at the moment of anointing. Also Cyril's *Mystagogical Catechesis II*, *On the rites before Baptism*, 3—where the naked candidate is anointed with 'exorcized oil', ἐλαίω ἡλείφεσθε ἐπορκιστῶ.

³¹ See Narsai's *Metrical Homily on the Epiphany*, lines 240, 292 and 294.

³² See Ephraim's *Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany*, 4:13.

³³ This form is often seen as typically Pauline as well as typically western. However, Romans 6:4 states that Jesus was raised from the dead διὰ τὸ so the motifs of dying/rising and glory are brought together in Paul's thought. It could be argued that the West focusses on the dying/rising and the East on the glory.

crucified, and then dipped three times to represent the three days that Jesus was in the tomb.³⁴ In his earthly life, Christ permitted himself to be confined in the Virgin's womb, the waters of baptism and the tomb;³⁵ because of this humble involvement in the material world, the believer can now put on glory in the water.³⁶

In these descriptions of baptism a number of verbal images are used which could be represented as visual images. These include biblical symbols such as the sheep and particular biblical narratives such as the Samaritan woman at the well. The references to sheep offers a possible explanation for their central position over the baptismal laver: perhaps they are not only a symbol of faithful disciples with their 'shepherd', but also one freely associated with the moment of baptism. For instance, in the hymns of Ephraim:

The sheep exalted when they saw the hand draw nigh to baptise them.
Receive, O ye sheep, your sealing; enter and be mingled in the flock!³⁷

It is interesting to consider whether the image of the baptismal laver as the sepulchre has any bearing on the large fresco on the North Wall at Dura of the women visiting the tomb. It is impossible to know for sure, but perhaps this image would resonate with the baptismal candidate as they walked across the room towards the baptismal laver: the candidate walking across the floor and the women walking in the image are both moving from East to West, as they each make their journey to the 'tomb', a journey which will be transformed by resurrection. This sense of journeying is strengthened by the other images of women walking which are along the East Wall; they, too, are part of the same journey, travelling northwards along the East Wall to follow behind the other group towards the sepulchre. It is often suggested that Christian art of this early period is simply a series of narrative sketches³⁸ and lacks the liturgical dimension evident in the arrangement of images in such later churches as San Vitale in Ravenna. This seems unwarranted to me—there could be a sophisticated reflection on baptismal liturgy here, specifically arranged around the baptismal laver.

³⁴ See Cyril's *Precatechesis*, 2:4.

³⁵ See Ephraim's *Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany*, 10:3.

³⁶ See Ephraim's *Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany*, 12:4.

³⁷ Ephraim's *Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany*, 6:6. Also 3:1–2, 3:7, 3:24–26, 6:15, 9:6.

³⁸ E.g. Grabar, 1969:96–97.

Just these brief references should make it clear that the textual allusions to these biblical narratives contain layers of symbolism. A story is not mentioned without a specific purpose and story is added to story to give a multi-layered symbolic evocation of doctrine. It seems highly unlikely, in the light of the sophistication of this textual tradition, that the fresco images were chosen with any less care. The suggestion that images like walking on the water or the Samaritan Woman are included simply because they are narratives which mention water is absurd. There is surely a much more subtle meditation being depicted, if only we had access to it.³⁹

In the case of walking on the water, we are faced with a real puzzle. There is a textual and artistic void surrounding this image. It is not mentioned in these eastern and syriac texts on baptism,⁴⁰ nor does it appear as an image in the catacombs. It is true that the total body of evidence available for comparison is very small; there could have been numerous early christian buildings with frescoes depicting Jesus and Peter walking on the water. But in the surviving material, this image is an anomaly, offering an elusive new direction for baptismal theology.⁴¹

³⁹ For instance, the story of Pilate washing his hands is used as an image of baptism, but one of the texts making this link explains why: Pilate washes his hands to separate himself from the evil actions about to be done; likewise the candidate who is baptised is washed to make a separation from evil and evildoers. See Ephraim's *Hymns for the Feast of Epiphany*, 7:23.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, the same authors do mention the pericope in other, non-baptismal, contexts. See Ephraim's *Hymns on Paradise*, Hymn 1.6; Cyril's *Catechetical Lectures*, 5:7. Interestingly, both these references are to walking, not sinking: Cyril refers to the buoyancy of Peter's faith and Ephraim's hymn speaks of the children of light descending and dancing on the water:

“From their abodes
the children of light descend,
they rejoice in the midst of the world
where they have been persecuted;
they dance on the sea's surface
and do not sink,

for Simon, although a “Rock”, did not sink.”

Perhaps there is a shared tradition here, in both text and image, that lays stress on the moment of Peter's miraculous walk and finds little of interest in his subsequent sinking.

⁴¹ An early text which does allude to a link between baptism and the story of walking on the water is Tertullian's *On Baptism*, ch. 9 and 11. Chapter 9 contains a list of all the ways that water is significant throughout Jesus' life, including walking on the water. Chapter 11 has a clear reference to Mt 14:22–33, but it is to *refute* the link between Peter's ‘immersion’ and baptism. Two points should be noted—this is a western, not an eastern text, and the genre of writing is different—to cite a narrative to win an argument about whether it is necessary to be baptised at all is different from evoking

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS (SEE ILLUSTRATION 1)

The fresco of walking on the water is on the upper register of the righthand wall as one faces the baptistry laver, to the right of an image of the healing of the paralytic. There is a thick line of solid colour and successive lines of patterned decoration (thinner red lines striped with the lighter background colour and covered in thin dark lines in a wavy pattern) which separates the upper register from the lower. Both registers are of a similar height, approximately 1.12 m.⁴² The lower register contains one large image which runs the length of the wall. There is no frame between the different images in the upper register; in fact, the waves of the sea reach the legs of the paralytic's bed. The illusion of a clear separation of the images is generated by a cut in the plaster made when the frescoes were removed from the wall for transportation to Yale. A large part of the image of walking on the water is missing, including the head of one of the two figures in the foreground and a significant proportion of the ship. The extant part of the fresco is a trapezoidal wedge, 0.20 m wide at the top and 1 m at the bottom.⁴³

There is extensive pitting and cracking in the surface of the plasterwork and some of the colours have degraded. When the fresco was first uncovered, for instance, the figures on the sea were both dressed in white, but this pigment was lost before the conservation process was completed.⁴⁴ Some strong colours do still remain, however: particularly the background wash of reddish brown which makes up both the sea and the extensive foreground of the scene of the paralytic, and the lighter pinkish brown wash which forms the sky behind the ship and the background to the scene of the paralytic.⁴⁵ Dark lines of varying thickness and colour are used to suggest detail such as the planking on the ship and the movement of the waves. The two figures in the foreground are also outlined in a dark colour, giving them a rather flat appearance. This may have been accentuated by the damage to the

it in a meditative way to explore doctrine. The latter seems more likely to give rise to a visual image, the former to further discussions on church order.

⁴² See Kraeling, 1967:57.

⁴³ See Kraeling, 1967:57.

⁴⁴ See Kraeling, 1967:63.

⁴⁵ See written description in Kraeling, 1967:62.

fresco, which has effectively obliterated any modelling.⁴⁶ The clothing of the figures in the ship (0.10 m) is highly coloured. From the left, they appear as: a red outline with pink garments, a yellow outline with white, a second red outline with pink, and a brown outline with green garments. It is impossible to tell how many disciples were depicted within the whole original ship. The ship itself is detailed, showing the planking, general shape and rigging typical of an ocean-going freighter of the type which used to travel between the Persian Gulf and India in this period.⁴⁷

Some of the shapes created in the two adjacent frescoes show a possible unity of composition between the two images. For instance, there are four figures with an outstretched arm which echo one another, and there are some similarities between the lines of the rigging and the angles of the sides of the paralytic's bed as he carries it.

The identities of the two larger (0.32 m) foreground figures continues to be disputed: which is Peter and which is Jesus? Grabar takes the view that the fresco depicts the moment in the story when Jesus rescues the sinking Peter.⁴⁸ It follows from this that he assumes that the lower figure is Peter, reaching up his arm for rescue. Kraeling takes the opposite view, identifying the lower figure as Jesus, because he is wearing the chiton and himation, while the upper figure wears only a plain tunic.⁴⁹ Kraeling suggests that other interpreters have wrongly made the assumption that Peter is the nearer, or lower, figure because they have been unduly influenced by the many nineteenth century illustrations of Jesus rescuing Peter; they have, in effect, been conditioned to assume that the moment of rescue is, in Lessing's terms, the truly encapsulating moment of this story. Kraeling takes the view that what is depicted here is the moment when Peter (the upper figure) is successfully walking on the water.⁵⁰

It is impossible to state with certainty which figure represents which character. Yet it would be valuable to know whether this is a fresco of Peter walking or sinking, since the message conveyed about the power of Jesus would be different in each case. Rather than trying to establish

⁴⁶ 'Modelling' is the use of light and shade to give figures the appearance of three dimensional shape.

⁴⁷ See Kraeling, 1967:62.

⁴⁸ See Grabar, 1967:70–71.

⁴⁹ See Kraeling, 1967:63.

⁵⁰ See Kraeling, 1967:63.

this on the basis of a preliminary identification of the figures, I want to look at two other factors—the feet of both figures and their stances.

Kraeling asserts that it is quite clear from the excavation reports that the feet of both figures are shod in sandals. The tracings made onto cellophane on site clearly show the straps of sandals.⁵¹ They also show considerably more detail on the feet of the lower figure than is now visible on photographic reproductions. The feet of the lower figure are walking, the back foot raised as if in the action of taking a step.⁵² If it is damage to the fresco (rather than painted water) which obscures the feet of the lower figure, then both figures originally had feet which were on the water and not under it. This impression is strengthened by examining the stance of the two figures. Together, they make a strong, almost symmetrical shape, giving no impression that one is being supported by the other. Some might argue that this simply shows a lack of artistic skill; yet the image of the paralytic walking with his bed is a considerably more unstable figure, moving with his back leaning forward and legs bent. If the artist had wanted to depict Peter faltering on the water, he had the skill to show the figure bending forward, or, indeed, being partially covered by the waves. It seems likely, therefore, that Peter is depicted walking, not sinking. It seems likely, therefore, that the lower figure of the two is Jesus. His position as further away from the boat than the upper figure, plus the detail of his garments make this likely. Once the assumption that Peter is sinking is removed, there is no reason to identify the lower figure as Peter.

The insight that Peter is walking rather than sinking is in harmony with the eastern texts on baptism already mentioned, which all use water as a positive image of protection, clothing and glory. The idea of water as representing chaos and danger, a force to be overcome, is absent from these texts. Could this generally positive symbolism for water have influenced the decision to depict Peter walking, not sinking? If so, it may be important that the waves of the sea lap at the legs of the paralytic's bed. Is this water not only the sea of Galilee but also the pool of Bethesda, a place of healing, where the water is disturbed, not by storms, but by angels?

⁵¹ See Illustration 2.

⁵² This pose is similar to that of the feet on the lower register fresco on the East Wall; also to figures in the Temple of Bel at Dura, see Kraeling, 1967:73.

Benefits for Interpretation

This fresco depicts a particular moment in this narrative: the point where Peter has left the boat and is walking on the water towards Jesus. As Kraeling pointed out, the first instinct of twentieth century commentators is to interpret the image differently: to see it as depicting the moment that Jesus rescues Peter. This was, in fact, my first interpretation on seeing this image and it was some time before I was persuaded that this ‘obvious’ and ‘self-evident’ interpretation was actually mistaken. My unseen and unexamined assumption was that the key moment in this story, Lessing’s ‘encapsulating moment’, could only be the moment of rescue. Why? What had conditioned me to read the text, (and so then the image) in this way? Perhaps the legacy of nineteenth and twentieth century illustration which Kraeling mentions had some effect, though many of these illustrations are kitsch religious images and so are unlikely to be the source of this tradition of interpretation. Perhaps these ideas originated in the nineteenth century discussions of the miracles of Jesus which centred on the Schleiermacherian notion of commending miracles as helpful and morally improving, rather than simply spectacular. An image of Peter sinking both illustrates a moment of salvation and hints at a message of moral and spiritual improvement—“Why did you doubt?” An image of Peter walking, on the other hand, depicts a mysterious sharing in divine power, a communion with Christ in which the disciple is raised to share the divine life. There are perhaps much deeper and broader themes here, relating to Eastern and Western emphases in the doctrine of the incarnation.

The important factor for interpreting Matthew 14:22–33, however, is to note that both ‘encapsulating’ moments are present in the text—the walking and the sinking, and we should not allow our theological and cultural conditioning to blind us to the importance of both in the interpretation of this pericope. The repetition of the phrase ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα in verses 28 and 29 mirrors the repetition of ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν / τῆς θαλάσσης in verses 25 and 26, thus creating a clear parallel between the walking of Jesus and the walking of Peter. Peter’s fear, sinking and rescue are described in verses 30 and 31, with clear allusions to the Psalms, especially, κύριε, σῶσον με. Both ‘moments’ involve dialogue between Peter and Jesus and both are written with a similar amount of detail. One benefit, then, of reflecting on the Dura fresco is to alert us to an aspect of this story which has sometimes been masked by western theological and cultural concerns.

A MARBLE BAS-RELIEF OF JESUS WALKING ON THE WATER BY THE
MASTER OF CABESTANY, ORIGINALLY FOR THE PORTAL OF SAN PERE
DE RODES (C. 1150–1200)⁵³

Historical and Geographical Context

The monastery of San Pere de Rodes was a Benedictine foundation. Its ruins are on the mountain of Verdera, not far from Barcelona, overlooking the Gulf of Rosas.⁵⁴ The monastery was begun in 1000 and consecrated in 1022, although work probably continued on its decoration after this date.⁵⁵ The monastery was abandoned in 1789, when the monks moved to a less isolated site; the Church was then vandalised over a period of time and many of the sculptures and reliefs were eventually taken into private collections and museums or lost.⁵⁶ There are only two small marble decorative fragments still *in situ* on the portal, one each side of the doorway. They show a frieze of intertwined leaves with small faces looking out.

The particular marble relief of Jesus walking on the water which is the subject of this study was originally part of the decoration around the west door.⁵⁷ We can be sure of its original setting because a nineteenth century traveller made a drawing with an inscription stating that it came from the ruins of the monastery where it formed part of the decoration of the principal doorway or 'Galilea'.⁵⁸ In an earlier written account from 1790, Francisco de Zamora described the whole portal as

⁵³ Illustration 3.

⁵⁴ See O'Neill, 1993:313–14.

⁵⁵ See Durliat, 1979:158.

⁵⁶ One large and detailed head is now in a collection in the Museum at Peralada; two smaller ones which have been detached from reliefs are in a private collection and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, respectively. A third small head was catalogued at an earlier period, but its location is now unknown. The possible body for the large head is conserved at Port de la Selva. The body appears to be carrying keys and a kind of baton which could be the remains of a cross, making it possible that the head and body belong to a large figure of Saint Peter which stood at one side of the door. Two capitals are in the Museum at Peralada, two more in the Barrachina Collection, one in the Worcester Art Museum, USA. A relief, *Agnus Dei*, and a fragment of a relief believed to be the healing of the man with the withered hand are in the Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona. See Sòria, 2000:120–22 for full details.

⁵⁷ Some claim that it is a fragment of the tympanum ('space enclosed between the lintel of a doorway and an arch over it.' Oxford Dictionary of Art) and therefore the focal point of the portal, e.g. Palol and Hirmer, 1967:160; others that it is impossible to know its position on the portal, e.g. Sòria, 2000:115–116.

⁵⁸ See O'Neill, 1993:313.

showing scenes from the Passion of Christ.⁵⁹ There is some room for doubt about this classification, however, as the only other identifiable narrative relief from this portal seems to depict the story of the healing of the man with the withered hand.⁶⁰ Could it be that Zamora was influenced by a single particularly prominent image and failed to see that the portal depicted scenes from the whole of Christ's ministry and not simply his Passion? This vexed question of the overall theme of the portal decorations has some bearing on whether or not this relief of Jesus walking on the water is to be regarded as a reinterpretation of a resurrection appearance⁶¹ (rather as Duccio weaves the image of Peter walking on the water into his reinterpretation of John 21:1–8—see the next section in this chapter), or whether it is better understood as a depiction of an incident in Christ's ministry and therefore more fully a realisation of Mt 14:22–33.

The Works of the Master of Cabestany

The personal history of the Master of Cabestany is unknown. The title 'Master of Cabestany' was coined by the art historian Gudiol in 1944, when he noticed a strong stylistic link between two previously unassociated works—the tympanum⁶² of the Church Sainte-Marie at Cabestany, near Perpignon (France) and another from a church at Errondo in Navarre (Spain). Certain distinctive qualities of the reliefs were so similar, particularly the details of the eyes and hands of the figures, that it seemed very likely that they were carved by the same sculptor. Once the distinctive features were elucidated and described, other art historians began to find further examples of the same artist's work. There are now some sixty attributions made during the course of the last fifty-eight years.⁶³ Many of these are fragments of sculptures, only some of which are *in situ*.

Even though the *oeuvre* of the Master of Cabestany has been traced successfully, his name, his biography and even his nationality remain unknown. There are no signatures and dates, and no documentary

⁵⁹ See Sòria, 2000:115.

⁶⁰ See Sòria, 2000:122.

⁶¹ See Sòria, 2000: 113–116, who consistently calls this relief *Apparition du Ressuscité aux apôtres sur le lac de Tibériade*.

⁶² 'the space enclosed between the lintel of a doorway and an arch over it.' Oxford Dictionary of Art, entry 'tympanum'.

⁶³ See Sòria, 2000: 208–209.

evidence such as letters or contracts to guide us. His works have been discovered in Spain, France and Italy, but there is no historical evidence as to which country was his home, or as to the date or itinerary of his journeys.⁶⁴ In fact, it has been suggested that he may have exported his sculptures from a fixed workshop, rather than travelled as an itinerant craftsman.⁶⁵ This argument is challenged (but not entirely demolished) by the chemical evidence that the stone used for many sculptures was sourced locally.⁶⁶

When attributions are made on stylistic evidence alone, it is always possible that some artefacts are the work of apprentices or followers of the master. The labelling of some works as 'early' on the basis of their naive qualities and others as 'late' because they seem to exhibit a maturity of style is similarly unreliable. As Poisson puts it, 'the Master of Cabestany' is essentially a critical construction:

Comme nous ignorons tout de son histoire, le Maître de Cabestany n'existe pour nous que par les qualités plastiques de son art; du moins est-ce à l'aide de celles-ci que plusieurs historiens ont *construit* cet artiste.⁶⁷
[italics his]

The distinctive style of the Master of Cabestany could be described as brutal yet subtle. The faces of his figures, for instance, are recognisable by their oval eyes with distinctive drilling either side of the eyeball, their high and ill-formed ears, their prominent foreheads and straight noses, their over-sized hands; yet listing such features does not begin to do justice to the subtlety of feeling conveyed by the different facial expressions of these figures. The small head at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for instance, has unadorned drillwork either side of the eyeball and in the beard, yet the mouth and cheek are so smooth and finely formed that they evoke vulnerable, living flesh. His images are often composed with a plethora of animals and angels giving a crowded

⁶⁴ See Mallet, 2000:20.

⁶⁵ E.g. Durliat, 1979:163 gives evidence of finished works being shipped from a workshop to their destination in 1232.

⁶⁶ Pace Mallet, 2000:22, who states categorically that the local source for stone rules out an exporting workshop. However, there is some contemporary evidence of stone being supplied by the one who commissioned a work, see Toman, 1997:17; even if the double journey required in this instance—of first material and then finished work—is rather unlikely.

⁶⁷ Poisson, 2000:8.

sense of movement and life.⁶⁸ His style is strikingly original, even when viewed in relation to the contemporary influences on his work.⁶⁹

The iconography of his images is also sometimes unusual. His depiction of the glorified Mother of God with her eyes closed on the tympanum at Cabestany is without known precedent, for instance; and gives rise to detailed discussion as to whether a particular theological point is intended.⁷⁰ Other details on other works, such as the angel holding Habbakuk by the beard outside the lion's den⁷¹ or the Virgin's belt held by St Thomas,⁷² can be traced to Old and New Testament apocryphal texts and traditions. It has been suggested that these iconographical irregularities point to the Master's involvement with a heretical group such as the Cathars, but little or no evidence can be put forward to substantiate this view.⁷³

⁶⁸ See Pressouyre, 1969:31; "Il excelle dans les compositions touffues où grouillent pêle-mêle animaux et personnages."

⁶⁹ Islamic influence can be traced through a comparison of the composition of certain illustrations in mozarabic Spanish manuscripts, e.g. a relationship between manuscript depictions of Daniel in the lions' den and the Master's sculpted capitals of the scene. See Burrini, 2000:133. (For a discussion of the complex relationship between medieval Spanish Christians and Muslims, see Dodds, 1993:27–37.) Local styles and traditions are also indicated by the similarities between the Master's depictions of Christ and certain Catalan frescoes. See Burrini, 2000:134–136.

⁷⁰ E.g. see Durlat's interpretation, "Davantage interprétons-nous ce détail comme une claire proclamation de la foi en l'Assomption corporelle de la mère de Dieu. C'est un corps de chair qui monte au ciel." Durlat, 1973:117.

⁷¹ See BHL KAI DRAKWN, 36, both Greek versions (LXX, Theodotion) agree that Habbakuk was carried by his hair to Babylon. The Master of Cabestany has adapted the scene, possibly substituting grasping the beard because it was a familiar mozarabic motif (see Burrini, 2000:77), but the story remains recognisable.

⁷² There is an apocryphal story that Mary threw down her belt to the sceptical Thomas during her Assumption. It is in only one Latin version of the Assumption, *The Transitus of Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathaea*. The date is uncertain—Clayton says later than C7th, James asserts C13th. (Tischendorf edited the text from three C13th and C14th Italian manuscripts). The presence of this motif in a work by the Master of Cabestany confirms that this story had a wider appeal in the mid-C12th, and was known not just in Prato, Italy where there was a relic of the belt, but also in France. See Burrini, 2000:85. For details of the text see James, 1953:217–18; Elliott, 1993:714–16; Clayton, 1998:99.

⁷³ See Lyman, 1994:46. Lyman explains how this view originated with Marcel Robin in 1947, but that it was merely Robin's personal response to the Master's unusual style and iconography, which Robin interpreted as a sarcastic parody of orthodox doctrine. No present day scholar of the medieval period would attribute such artistic independence to a sculptor commissioned by clerical authority; independent artistic expression flying in the teeth of what is expected is a much more modern phenomenon. Lyman summarizes his view of the theory in one word, "absurd," Lyman, 1994:46. If there is any inter-relationship between the works of the Master of Cabestany and contemporary heresies, his sculptures would have been intended as affirmations of orthodoxy, since

DESCRIPTION

This relief is 82 cm high by 61 cm wide. It is carved on a piece of reclaimed marble, which still shows marks of the original work on the reverse. The scene includes two Latin inscriptions, carved with letters in a consciously antique style.⁷⁴ The inscription across the top of the relief reads:

VBID[OMI]N[V]SAPARVITDSC[V]P[V]LIS[I]NMAR[I]
 (*ubi dominus aparuit discipulis in mari.*)⁷⁵

The figure of Christ fills almost the full height of the relief. His feet are towards us and rest on top of the waves. His large left hand is raised in a formal gesture of blessing, his right hand curves around what appears to be a book, held flat against his body. The inscription on the book reads *pax vobis*. To the left of the figure of Christ is a boat with two disciples in it. They are looking towards him. The disciple nearest Christ raises his oversized left hand in acknowledgment and has brought his left foot up onto the prow of the boat, as if he is about to climb out. His right hand still holds an oar. The other disciple has both hands on a second oar. He is wearing a brimless hat. The foreground in front of the boat is filled with a series of curving wave patterns, making a highly textured decoration through which swim six fish.

Questions of Iconography

Despite the strong visual indication that Jesus is walking on the water and the textual clarification, *ubi dominus aparuit discipulis in mari*, this relief has been traditionally known as *The Calling of Peter and Andrew*.⁷⁶ Gudiol calls it *The Miraculous Catch of Fish*.⁷⁷ Both of these titles ignore the fact

they were commissioned and paid for by the orthodox hierarchy. Although discredited, the view that the Master was a heretic is nevertheless still repeated by other scholars, see Geese, 1997:281.

⁷⁴ See O'Neill, 1993:314. O'Neill judges that the inscription is integral to the work, not a later addition. (There is a relief of the *Agnus Dei* from San Pere de Rodas which has a similar inscription. See Sòria, 2000:118–19.)

⁷⁵ From O'Neill, 1993:314.

⁷⁶ See discussion of this issue in O'Neill, 1993:313–14; this title is even used without discussion in another article in the same volume, Klein, 1993:191. Also Durlat 1973:118, (although in 1962, he identified it as a portrayal of Mt 14:29a). Also Presouyre, 1969:42, who calls it *The calling of Saint Peter*.

⁷⁷ See Gudiol, 1964:71. Also Palol and Hirmer, 1967:77, 484, who call it by both titles successively.

that Jesus is standing on the waves and that the disciples are not fishing. Such iconographical mistakes can only have arisen through familiarity with other images which typically include a boat, fish, disciples and Jesus. The use of the verb *aparuit* in the phrase at the top of the relief and the inscription *pax vobis* on the book Christ is holding might suggest that this is a depiction of a resurrection scene. If it were such a scene, the narrative in John 21 would be a strong possibility, since it is the only resurrection narrative involving the sea.⁷⁸ There are more points of correspondence with this narrative than with the stories of the calling of Peter and Andrew. However, if one makes this identification, certain other features immediately become puzzling: why is Jesus standing on the waves rather than the shore? Why are the words *pax vobis* used when the phrase does not occur in this narrative? Where is the net full of fish which prompts John's confession?

On the other hand, if one assumes that this is an image inspired by Mt 14:22–33, the words *pax vobis* are equally foreign to the narrative's dialogue, and *aparuit* seems less apt than *ambulat*. Is this then the transformation of the story of Jesus walking on the water into a resurrection appearance? A clear identification of the source narrative as either John 21 or Matthew 14 is not possible; however, it may be possible to trace an additional source which will clarify the iconographical peculiarities of this relief.

In 1977, Kupfer argued that the unusual iconography of the tympanum from Errondo, also attributed to the Master of Cabestany, might be an illustration of ideas from Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. The tympanum illustrates the three temptations of Christ. It includes some unusual features, for instance, figures which have few, if any, precedents in other depictions from this period.⁷⁹ However, Kupfer did find parallels to these themes in Augustine's comments on Psalm 91, and suggested that Augustine's text might be the source for the particular way the narrative is realised in this relief.

Certain historical facts add to his argument: the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* were popular in this period—one hundred and fifty-three manuscripts

⁷⁸ Sòria identifies the narrative as a resurrection account from John's Gospel and also remarks that Jesus is 'debout sur les eaux' without offering any explanation for this anomaly. See Sòria, 2000:116.

⁷⁹ Kupfer suggests that depictions tend to either have only one temptation scene, or three scenes clearly distinguished by scenic devices such as a stone, a building, a mountain. For a detailed description, plus lists of frescoes, manuscripts and mosaics, see Kupfer, 1977:23–24.

were made in the twelfth century. (This compares with a total of only one hundred and sixty-seven manuscripts made in the tenth, eleventh, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries put together). There is some evidence that copies were held in the geographical region of Errondo during the period in which the tympanum must have been commissioned and carved.⁸⁰ This evidence remains circumstantial, of course, but given the tentative nature of any conclusions concerning the sources for the Master of Cabestany's works, it raises an interesting possibility.⁸¹ Perhaps the theory can be extended—could Augustine's writings also be the source for the unusual features in this relief of Christ walking on the water?

Augustine refers to Matthew 14:22–33 in his comments on three Psalms in *Enarrationes in Psalmos*: 40, 55 and 94.⁸² In his comments on Psalm 40:5, Augustine asserts that it is a great wonder to cause another to walk on the water:

Now then look at the actor! For the man hath by dint of great pains learnt to walk upon a rope; and hanging there he hold thee hanging in suspense. Turn to Him who exhibits spectacles far more wonderful (*maiorum spectaculorum*). This man hath learned to walk upon the rope; but hath he caused another to walk on the sea? (*numquid fecit in mari ambulare?*)⁸³

Augustine also speaks of the sea as the world, so that to walk on the water is to overcome the world. This triumphant understanding of the miracle of walking on the water is perhaps reflected in the majestic figure of Christ in this image, which fills the righthand side of the relief. A triumphant image would also accord with the known range of themes used in the decoration of medieval church portals.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ See Kupfer, 1977:23.

⁸¹ More than 20 years later, Mallet quotes the theory without qualification or reserve, see Mallet, 2000:167.

⁸² He also discusses the story in four sermons on Matthew's Gospel (LXXI, LXXV, LXXVI, and LXXX). The importance of the miracle of Christ walking on the water is emphasized in Sermon LXXI on Mt 12:32. Augustine uses it to differentiate between the actions of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: "Eodem modo cum rectissime dicamus, non Patrem, nec Spiritum sanctum, sed Filium super mare ambulasse, cujus unius caro erat illa et plantae fluctibus innitentes."

⁸³ English Nicene Fathers, etc. Latin, *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, Vol. XXX-VIII. Enarratio in Ps. XXXIX, section 9, lines 28–32.

⁸⁴ See Sekules, 2001:82–85 on the growing importance of facades and portals as sites for monumental sculpture from the early 12th century. Common scenes were the Last Judgement (with an emphasis on Christ as Redeemer), the Virgin Mary and exemplary images of saints, prophets and biblical Kings. See Deimling, 1997:324–327 on the legal and social importance of medieval church portals.

In describing the sea as the world, Augustine goes on to talk about the fish in the sea:

—it hath men in it who, like fish delight in their own ruin, and prey upon each other; (*habet homines uelut pisces de suo malo gaudentes, et tamquam se inuicem deuorantes;*)⁸⁵

Could this be the source for the fish in this image? One fish appears to swim out from under Christ's feet, another swims diagonally down the relief, in line with the angle of the oars and could be about to bite a larger fish swimming across the relief horizontally. Are these an image of those who delight in their own ruin, rather than simply part of the Master of Cabestany's exuberant evocation of the sea?

In his comments on Psalm 94:18, Augustine again links walking on the water with overcoming the forces of the world by saying that to walk on the sea means to trample the heads of the proud:

Videbatur Dominus ambulare super mare, calcans capita omnium superbiorum in isto saeculo. Ipsum iter suum calcantis capita superbiorum, significauit ambulans super tumidos fluctus.

He goes on to say that this is the action of the Church as well as of Christ:

Calcat et ecclesia: nam ipsa est Petrus.... Calcat enim et ecclesia capita superbiorum.

If these texts form the background to our image, then it becomes a triumphant and glorious one, evoking Christ's final victory over evil. Peter's foot poised on the prow becomes the response of the faithful Church to the call to participate in Christ's triumph.

Augustine's allusions to this narrative creatively link three theological strands: an incident in Christ's ministry, the triumph of the resurrection and the final Parousia and judgement of the world. This is certainly in harmony with this work produced by the Master of Cabestany, with its imposing figure of Christ, its reference to the resurrection (*pax vobis* and *aparuit*) and its population of restless fish. It would also accord with the scenes of triumph and judgement commonly depicted on church portals and tympanums within this period. On the other hand, such an identification must remain cautious since it cannot be substantiated from contemporary sources.

⁸⁵ English from Nicene Fathers etc. Latin from Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, Vol. XXXVIII. Enarratio in Ps. XXXIX, section 9, lines 37–39.

Benefits for Interpretation

This relief evokes a moment in which Christ stands on the water and Peter moves to join him. It is likely that this is a depiction of Matthew 14:29a, possibly enhanced with the doctrinal associations which Augustine weaves into his retelling of this narrative. The hand gestures of Jesus and Peter are very prominent in this image, evoking the verbal exchange of verses 28–29. This is an unusual 'encapsulating moment' to choose; it shows the faith of Peter in the willingness to leave the boat—walking or sinking are not part of this image. It highlights the importance of the words spoken in verses 28–29, which are often neglected in favour of those in verses 30–31.⁸⁶

The majestically robed figure of Jesus turns at the waist to gesture to Peter, but his feet remain towards the viewer. His head is inclined towards Peter, but his gaze is towards the viewer. Again, the gaze of the disciples is towards Jesus yet reaches beyond him. The fact that the figures in the relief do not form a closed group looking only at one another draws the viewer into the scene. Jesus' outstretched hand of both blessing and command and the words that he holds, *pax vobis* are a reassurance and a challenge not only to the disciples but to every worshipper preparing to enter the portal of San Pere de Rodes.

THE APPEARANCE ON LAKE TIBERIAS, A PANEL FROM DUCCIO'S
ALTARPIECE, THE *MAESTÀ* (1308–11)⁸⁷ (EGG TEMPERA ON A POPLAR
PANEL, NOW MEASURING 36.5 × 47.5 CM)

The Historical Context

This painting was originally part of the celebrated *Maestà* altarpiece which Duccio was commissioned to paint for Siena Cathedral. The relevant extant documents⁸⁸ state that the arrangements for the payment

⁸⁶ E.g. see Tasker, 1961:145–146, who dismisses Peter's words and actions in verses 28–29 as presumption; Kee, 1993:627 says that this incident "presents vividly and succinctly Peter's brashness." Gundry sees Peter's actions as a type of haggadic midrash on the theme of discipleship, using imagery from the Psalms to reflect on issues such as: "—confessing Jesus as Lord, obeying Jesus' command, being guilty of little faith in persecution, crying out for deliverance, and being rescued and rebuked by Jesus." Gundry, 1982:300. Such approaches take verses 30–31 as pivotal.

⁸⁷ Illustration 4.

⁸⁸ The documents are reproduced in White, 1979:192–6 and Bomford, 1989:191–196.

of the commission were drawn up on 9th October, 1308 and that the altarpiece was installed in the Duomo in June 1311.

Duccio painted in a workshop setting, with a number of apprentices.⁸⁹ Although the commissioning document stipulated that ‘*-dictus Duccius laborabit suis manibus in dicta tabula*,’⁹⁰ it is likely that the artists working with him contributed a great deal of labour, otherwise the work could not have been finished in just three years.⁹¹ The altarpiece was moved from the high altar in 1506, and finally sawn up into separate panels in 1771.⁹²

The term *Maestà* means ‘majesty’ and is used to describe an image of the Virgin Mary in glory, surrounded by saints.⁹³ Commissions for altarpieces depicting the *Maestà* were common in Italy during this period, although Duccio’s was the first to be painted in a ‘landscape’ format and on such an ambitious scale. Mary the Mother of God became the Protectress of Siena in an official ceremony in 1260.⁹⁴ Any image of Mary in Siena was therefore a symbol of civic pride and identity, as well as a focus for religious devotion.⁹⁵ This *Maestà* included kneeling figures of four of Siena’s patron saints, perhaps interceding for the city.⁹⁶ Duccio’s work was highly prized and his talent recognised, but only within a complex web of social, political, communal and religious concerns. There was certainly no concept of ‘art for art’s sake’ at this period.

⁸⁹ SigismondoTizio wrote in his *Historiae*, circa 1530: “*ex cujus officina veluti ex equo Troiano pictores egregii prodierunt*.” ‘From whose workshop distinguished painters emerged as heroes emerged from the horse of Troy.’ Quoted in Jannella, 1991:24–25; White, 1979:13; from Valle, *Della Lettere senesi di un socio dell’Accademia di Fossano sopra le belle arti 1782–86*. Vol. II:68.

⁹⁰ See Bomford, 1989:191. Norman suggests that this phrase was simply the commissioners’ way of ensuring that parts of the work were not sub-contracted to other workshops. See Norman, 1995:52.

⁹¹ Some critics suggest that one can detect the hand of different apprentices in the different panels. White describes these divisions as “—playing attributional snap.” White, 1979:105. Bellosi suggests that an apprentice’s work would have involved gilding and the painting of repetitive areas depicting fabric, etc., not expressive areas such as facial expressions; see Bellosi, 1999:20. The theory that an apprentice would not have painted a complete panel alone is confirmed by X-radiograph and infra-red work done in the National Gallery, which has revealed evidence of more than one hand. See Bomford et al., 1989:87–89.

⁹² See Bomford et al., 1989:73.

⁹³ See entry for ‘Maestà’ in the Oxford Dictionary of Art.

⁹⁴ This ceremony took place in front of an earlier altarpiece over the High Altar, which also depicted the Virgin and Child enthroned, known popularly as the *Madonna degli occhi grossi* (Our Lady of the Big Eyes). See Norman, 1995:70.

⁹⁵ See Norman, 1995:64, who describes the *Maestà* as a ‘monumental civic icon.’

⁹⁶ Ansanus, Sabinus, Crescentius and Victor. See Bomford et al., 1989:190.

Huge celebrations took place when the completed altarpiece was paraded to the Cathedral, the *Duomo*.⁹⁷ The dimensions of the main panel depicting the Mother of God in glory are now 214 × 412 cm; with the original wooden frame which surrounded and supported it, the altarpiece may have been as wide as 5 metres as it was carried through the streets and followed by ecclesiastical and civic dignitaries. This blend of art, politics and faith can also be illustrated by examining Duccio's 'signature'. Around the base of Mary's throne are painted the words:

Mater sca [sancta] Dei sis causa Senis requiei sis Duccio vita te quia pinxit ita.⁹⁸

They are both an evocation of political realities ('the peace of Siena') and a prayer, ('O holy Mother of God'). The reality of contact between this world and the supernatural realm of heaven is assumed. The production of the altarpiece has been an act of devotion in itself, as well as being the making of an artefact to feature in worship. Awareness of the supernatural realm (*Mater sca Dei*) and awareness of personal artistic endeavour⁹⁹ (*Duccio... te quia pinxit ita*) exist side by side in a public and civil arena (*sis causa Senis requiei*).

The Physical Context of this Panel

The altarpiece was double-sided: the front was the massive image of the *Maestà*, the back of this image was covered with fourteen panels depicting twenty six scenes of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ.¹⁰⁰ It originally stood behind the high altar, which at the time was directly under the cupola, at the centre of the transept.¹⁰¹ These smaller scale scenes were designed to be seen by the clergy, who met in the choir behind the altar, and possibly also to be used as an altar of the Passion.¹⁰² Above the main panels on the front and the back was a crowning frieze

⁹⁷ See Bomford et al., 1989:196 for the agreement to pay trumpeters, pipers and castanet players for "—a meeting with the panel of the Virgin Mary."

⁹⁸ See Bomford et al., 1989:72. "O Holy Mother of God, grant peace to Siena and life to Duccio who has painted you thus." Translation from Jannella, 1991:21.

⁹⁹ See White, 1979:100.

¹⁰⁰ These have been reassembled in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.

¹⁰¹ See Bellosi, 1999:11.

¹⁰² See Bellosi, 1999:12. See also Norman, 1995:70, where she suggests that the altarpiece screened off an exclusive clergy domain, where they would have said their daily Offices.

of smaller panels. A similar line of smaller panels (the Predella) were underneath the main front and back image. The crowning section over the scenes of the Passion and Resurrection consisted of further resurrection scenes,¹⁰³ including this panel, now called 'Appearance at Lake Tiberias', which shows Peter walking on the water. The original context of this panel among resurrection appearances thus helps to confirm that it is primarily a depiction of John 21:1–8, and not Mt 14:29–30.

This panel is thought to have been positioned third from the left on the reverse of the crowning section, to the right of the scene of *Doubting Thomas*, and to the left of the now missing centre panels. These different panels, and indeed all the panels on the reverse section, offer a series of interrelationships which it would be difficult to achieve in a text. Although the panels represent different episodes in the life of Christ, they do not form a narrative analogous to a cartoon strip, where each frame only makes sense when viewed in connection with the frame before it and the one after it, and where any change in sequence makes the narrative nonsensical; rather, each frame is a depiction of the encapsulating moment of a pericope and thus can be seen as a single story, or as part of a narrative sequence, or within a more complex relationship of themes and symbols. The altarpiece allows viewers to choose their own pathway through these different levels of interpretation, moving back and forth from one level to another if they so desire.

The visual nature of each panel allows Duccio to make some subtle interpretative links between stories. One method for achieving this is the use of similar details within a scene, such as a similar background or a similar grouping of figures.¹⁰⁴ There are similarities between the composition of *The Calling of the First Disciples* and *The Appearance on Lake Tiberias*. Does Duccio see these two moments when Peter responds to Jesus as analogous? If the links between adjacent panels are handled so carefully, does Duccio intend us to see a relationship between the faith of Thomas and the faith of Peter depicted on adjacent images?

It is thought that the panels of the reverse of the *Maestà* were intended for the clergy who would be seated behind the altar, in the choir area, during the Eucharist.¹⁰⁵ The importance of the eucharistic context

¹⁰³ There may have been an ascension and a Christ in glory in the central part of this row of panels, but these panels have been lost. See White, 1979:110.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. see the two trials before Pilate, and the tomb in the burial and resurrection panels.

¹⁰⁵ See White, 1979:99.

should not be underestimated when interpreting any particular panel. The individual paintings were never intended to be viewed alone, but as part of a comprehensive presentation. They would have been seen mainly by candlelight, or by the light filtered through stained glass windows.

In the context of artistic tradition

Duccio is widely regarded as the founder of the Sienese school of painting; in other words, his work was so innovative and skillful that it is now seen as a new departure rather than a continuation of tradition. His style did not appear in a vacuum, of course, and many feel that his approach to the painting of figures (particularly the Virgin) is a creative development of the techniques of Cimabue.¹⁰⁶ His style also offers a backward look to Byzantine art with its highly stylised iconic figures against a gilded background, and a forward look to a more naturalistic interpretation of human relationships.¹⁰⁷ His ability to evoke narrative scenes with a combination of background gilding, scenic detail and the composition of the figures is remarkable.¹⁰⁸

The question arises as to what theological traditions shaped Duccio's thinking in composing the narrative scenes of the *Maestà*. Unfortunately, if there were any detailed commissioning documents specifying the narratives to be depicted, they have been lost,¹⁰⁹ so we cannot be entirely sure how much of the narrative cycles reflect Duccio's own sources and how much was specified by the authorities at the Cathedral.

We do have a document for the earlier commission given to Duccio for the *Rucellai Madonna*; there the instruction is simply to paint a 'Madonna and Child and other figures'.¹¹⁰ Other extant documents for other artists become increasingly detailed as the century progresses, even

¹⁰⁶ E.g. see Jannella, 1991:7–8. Jannella quotes Roberto Longhi's theory that Duccio spent time with Cimabue in Assisi during the 1270's–1280's. Also Bellosi, who is unconvinced that this was a master-pupil relationship, describing it as “—more a critical dialogue between two great artists.” Bellosi, 1999:9. The *Rucellai Madonna* was originally attributed to Cimabue, before it was correctly identified as from the hand of Duccio.

¹⁰⁷ See Bomford et al., 1989:72.

¹⁰⁸ See Bellosi's comment on Duccio's style, his “—lyrical resolution of the relationship between the figures and the backgrounds, be they gold grounds, architectural backdrops, or rocky landscapes.” Bellosi, 1999:15.

¹⁰⁹ Extant documents do not describe the commission, only the working agreement.

¹¹⁰ “—de figura beate Marie Virginis et ejus omnipotentis Filii et aliarum figurarum,” from a document in the Florence State Archive, dated 15th April, 1285; reproduced in White, 1979:186.

down to specifying the sheep which must appear in a Nativity scene.¹¹¹ At this early date, it seems unlikely that Duccio would have received a commission which specified the subject of each of the thirty-eight smaller narrative panels on the crowning section and the predella.¹¹² It is unlikely that the rubric for the resurrection scene by the lake would be prescriptive enough to include the instruction—‘the figure of Peter must be walking on the water’. This exegetical anomaly surely lies within the scope of Duccio’s own contribution to the *Maestà*.

If Duccio’s work was not closely dictated in every detail by his commissioning patrons, what were his other sources of inspiration? One suggestion is that he visited frescoed churches such as Giotto’s Padua Chapel (1303–6) in order to borrow techniques of composition for achieving balance and coherence in a polyptych work.¹¹³ He certainly based the composition of certain individual narrative panels on tried and tested arrangements.¹¹⁴ There is no clear precedent for painting Peter walking on the water, however; and certainly none for doing so in a picture of John 21:1–7.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ E.g. a contract for Francesco di Michele to paint a tabernacle for the church of San Matteo, Florence details that the Nativity is to contain: shepherds, sheep, animals, mountains and angels etc. See Bomford et al., 1989:7–8.

¹¹² See Norman, 1995:75, “—it is highly likely that the civic and ecclesiastical authorities of Siena specifically expected Duccio to represent hallowed religious images and narrative scenes in a manner that was conventional and yet innovative in form.” See also White, 1979:182, n. 51: “It is often too readily assumed in iconographic studies... that artists in the late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance were merely carrying out programmes handed to them by ecclesiastics. The close correlation between great artists, great stylistic innovation and great iconographic invention suggests that from the time of Nicola Pisano to that of Michelangelo and Raphael it was, on the contrary, rather rarely the case.”

¹¹³ E.g. consistency of setting, costume, etc. Scenes which take place in the same location have recognisable features of scenery or architecture. Each disciple wears the same clothes on different panels and has recognisable facial features. Duccio also drew on Nicola Pisano’s sculpture in the *Duomo*, particularly the pulpit (for the King with his crown dangling on his arm) and the figure of Sibyl on the facade (for the posture and expression of the three Mary’s at the tomb). See White, 1979:125. There may also be a possible link to Cimabue’s *Crucifixion* (1280–83) at Assisi, see Bellosi, 1999:15. He did not, however, base his depiction of resurrection appearances solely on Giotto’s work because the Padua Chapel has only one fresco of the resurrection, *Noli me tangere* (1304–6).

¹¹⁴ See Circle of Guido da Siena, *St Peter Enthroned, with four scenes from his life* (c. 1275) for the source of the composition of *The Annunciation* and *The Calling of the First Disciples*.

¹¹⁵ There is an interesting parallel in iconography with a relief in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. By the sculptor Jean Ravy, this painted wooden scene is part of a frieze depicting nine

Description and Analysis

This scene is depicted with a blend of naturalistic and stylized features. The light and shade on the fishing net, for instance, give a naturalistic representation of the strain caused by the heavy catch; as do the postures of the disciples hauling it in. On the other hand, the gilded background and the way the rock is depicted are traditional Byzantine features, while the boat is little more than a brown shape enclosing the group of disciples which gives no impression of realistic seaworthiness. The sea itself is represented by a series of parallel wavy lines and gives no sense of recession. The scene is dominated by the figures: by their arrangement and postures, as much as by their facial expressions. There are seven disciples, just as in John 21:1–7. The five looking to the left are all looking at Jesus, but those in the boat respond differently from Peter. Three of the four disciples looking at Jesus from the boat do so by turning their heads, because they have their backs partially turned towards him. Only Simon the Zealot, the disciple in the bow of the boat, is facing Jesus, and both his body and his viewpoint are obscured by the other disciples in front of him. All six figures in the boat make a compact, almost symmetrical group, separate from Peter and Jesus.

The gazes of the four disciples looking at Jesus from the boat involve them in his resurrection appearance, but their partially turned backs and close grouping around the nets make them appear reluctant or afraid to respond to him by taking any action. John, the one disciple in the boat with a visible free hand not engaged in pulling in the net, gestures not towards Jesus, but towards his companions. It is as if he is testifying that the figure on the shore is indeed the risen Lord, as in Jn 21:7.

The heads of the disciples looking at Jesus rise in a diagonal line from the figure in the bow of the boat to Peter. Peter's eyelevel is just below that of Jesus. Peter is further away from Jesus than from the disciples, yet his stance facing Jesus, his open hands and his almost equivalent eye level make him seem more closely connected to Jesus than to his fellow disciples.

Jesus is shown in similar pose to his depiction in the panel of *The Calling of the First Disciples*. His hands, in particular, convey the same gesture, which contrasts with the gesture with which he is depicted in

resurrection appearances. Completed c. 1350, it is obviously not a source for Duccio's work, but it would be interesting to know if they shared a common influence.

the panel *The Appearance on the Mountain at Galilee*.¹¹⁶ Since this gesture in the *Calling* panel conveys a sense of “Follow me,” is it possible that a similar speech is implied here?

Jesus’ garments have a pattern of gold striation,¹¹⁷ a Byzantine technique. Small wounds are visible on his hands. Peter is shown in his characteristic pale blue robe. He has bare feet. Peter’s feet appear to be on the surface of the water rather than under it and his back foot is lifted as if in the action of taking a step. His upright stance and his stature in comparison with Jesus confirm that he is walking on the water, not wading through it.

Benefits for Interpretation

Duccio is a highly skilled storyteller through the medium of the painted panel. Given his skills at evoking a narrative and his commitment to incidental detail,¹¹⁸ it seems unlikely that his depiction of Peter walking on the water is an accidental confusion of stories. We have no evidence that he was commissioned to add this detail and no artistic evidence that it was a traditional depiction, so it is difficult to discern its significance.

It is striking that none of the disciples is looking at Peter, nor registering alarm or amazement at his miraculous walking. Their focus is either on the net of fish or on Jesus. The full net and the gilded figure of Jesus both suggest that we are entering the narrative at the moment of recognition—the nets are full because Jesus has directed the disciples to a miraculous catch, and this miracle has revealed that the figure on the shore is none other than the risen Christ himself. This recognition is the central theme of the panel, and Peter walking on the water is a response to this revelation, rather than a separate miraculous action. The Matthean element of Peter wanting to do the same miraculous action as his master is absent, since Jesus is standing on the rocky shore. Peter also shows no self-consciousness about his actions: his facial

¹¹⁶ Note how Jesus holds out both hands, with one finger raised as if teaching or making a point, whereas *the Calling of the First Disciples* and *the Appearance on Lake Tiberias* he holds out one hand.

¹¹⁷ Duccio uses gold striation to indicate glory: see depictions of resurrection appearances, but also the transfiguration and the figures of Gabriel and Mary at the annunciation, and Mary at Pentecost. Jesus’ robes are also the traditional blue and red, as in Orthodox icons.

¹¹⁸ E.g. the correct number of disciples in the boat for a depiction of John 21:2–7, trials before both Herod and Pilate, etc.

expression conveys neither triumph nor doubt, and his gaze is directed to Jesus, not at his own feet. One could imagine that he is walking on the water without realising that he is doing so, his thoughts are taken up so completely with his desire to reach Jesus.

This panel could be seen as a conflated version of several scenes within this Johannine resurrection narrative: it holds together both the moment when Peter rushes to the shore to be near the Risen Lord, and the moment when Jesus recommissions Peter in the same words which he used (in Mk 1:17 and Mt 4:19) to call him to be a disciple, "Follow me." (Jn 21:19). The sense that Jesus is calling Peter is heightened by the similarities of composition and gesture in the lower panel, *The Calling of the First Disciples*. Perhaps Peter is shown as able to walk on the water now because, when he sees the Risen Lord, he is able to respond with the faith he lacked on the former occasion when he tried and sank.¹¹⁹ Without this motif of miraculous walking, it would be difficult to convey visually the sense that Peter is being called a second time, and responding with a transformed faith, rather than merely struggling eagerly towards the shore. With the motif, a single unified visual image is able to convey a number of Gospel stories. Duccio has made walking on the water an encapsulating motif for faith and devotion. He has removed it from the narrative of Mt 14:22–33, yet the motif is dependent on that story for its meaning. The picture is thus an evocative image of a disciple responding with faith and devotion to the presence of the risen Jesus, and it invites the spectator to also 'draw near with faith'.

THE MOSAIC OF THE *NAVICELLA*, ST. PETER'S, ROME.¹²⁰
(ORIGINAL BY GIOTTO C. 1298–1320, MAJOR REVISION BY
MANENTI 1674–5)

The present mosaic of the *Navicella* in St. Peter's, Rome is all that remains of a celebrated work by Giotto. In its current form, it represents an adaptation of the work by Orazio Manenti completed in 1674–5.¹²¹ Although Manenti had access to a fullscale cartoon of the mosaic as it was in 1628,¹²² he had the unenviable task of remodelling a rectangular

¹¹⁹ I am indebted to the Rev'd Canon Pam Reed for this suggestion.

¹²⁰ Illustration 5.

¹²¹ See DiFrederico, 1983:4.

¹²² See Oakeshott, 1967:329.

work (13.5 m by 9.5 m)¹²³ to fit a smaller lunette, thus distorting Giotto's composition.¹²⁴ Evidence of joins on the cartoon suggest that some of the figures were made into cutouts and moved to try out new positions for the more restricted space of the lunette inside the main doors of the basilica.¹²⁵ It was not unusual in the seventeenth century to introduce quite extensive revisions of a mosaic during even routine restoration: 'improvements' were made according to the contemporary norms of modelling, facial expression and so on. It is possible that whole figures were removed from the original mosaic and re-positioned, but also that, where repair work was needed, it was done in a contemporary manner which was unsympathetic to the original. A clear example of this kind of restoration is the work on the sheep in the apse mosaic of SS. Cosma and Damiano (c. 530 CE.): two seventeenth century interlopers walk in a line of sixth century animals.¹²⁶ The *Navicella* did not escape similar treatment; as Oakeshott comments,

—the facial expressions of many of the figures (for example, the angler) have a disastrous inanity in the new version.¹²⁷

He justly concludes that Manenti's version of the *Navicella* is a "poor travesty"¹²⁸ of the original. The obvious shortcomings of the present work make it marginal to studies of Giotto's *Oeuvre* and of little interest to those describing the artistic treasures of St. Peter's. It is a Cinderella work, usually only discussed by art historians in relation to such vexed theoretical questions as the dating and iconographical sources of the lost original.¹²⁹

¹²³ See Oakeshott, 1967:329.

¹²⁴ Art historians argue as to how closely the 1628 cartoon resembled Giotto's original composition in any case, since the mosaic had been repaired and moved three times prior to the cartoon being painted. E.g. see Venturi, 1922:49–69 who claims that many details had already been added. See Oakeshott, 1967:328–9 for the contrary view. It is inconceivable, however, that Giotto would have clipped the stern and the sail of the ship in the way that it now appears, effectively securing the ship to the frame of the image and undermining any sense of movement or danger. The ship in the cartoon, on the other hand, is convincingly mobile on a restless sea. Vasari praised Giotto's depiction of the wind filling the sail; see Vasari, 1987:66–67.

¹²⁵ See Oakeshott, 1967:329.

¹²⁶ See Oakeshott, 1967:92, Plate IX.

¹²⁷ Oakeshott, 1967:329. The very quality of the angler's expression in Giotto's work was commented on by Vasari. See Vasari, 1987:67.

¹²⁸ Oakeshott, 1967:26.

¹²⁹ E.g. Paeseler, 1941, Venturi, 1922. Köhren-Jansen, 1993 is exceptional in giving greater detail.

For the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Mt 14:22–33, however, the very fact that the image has been cherished for seven centuries, (even though this has led to its artistic degradation) makes it of great significance. The image itself has a considerable *Wirkungsgeschichte*, including a number of Papal coins or medals, which were a form of propaganda or manifesto comment for the Pope who issued them.¹³⁰ What was it about this image that insured its reproduction and its transferral from Old to New St. Peter's? Why was it placed in a similar architectural location in both buildings, so that it was, and is, an image which one sees on leaving St. Peter's? There is an irony here: the very actions which degraded the work artistically preserved some continuity of context and of function. The panels of Duccio's *Maestà*, for instance, are much better preserved as masterpieces but have lost their function as an altarpiece entirely. The *Navicella* continues to communicate in the environment for which it was designed, even though in a modified form.

Mosaic as a Medium

Eve Borsook, in her work *Messages in Mosaic*, suggests that mosaic has been an imperial pictorial medium since early Christian times.¹³¹ Costly and enduring, the use of coloured and gold¹³² glass tesserae in the creation of murals opened up opportunities for reflecting and manipulating light with effects unrealisable in paint.¹³³ It is strange, then, that a narrative involving fear, crisis and darkness should be depicted in a medium best suited to triumph and dazzling glory, at least within the antique and medieval tradition of church mosaics.¹³⁴ This particular reflection on the Matthean pericope has an eschatological dimension, however,

¹³⁰ E.g., Paul II, Sixtus IV, Alexander VI, Julius II, Clement VII. See Köhren-Jansen, 1993: Plates 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, 70. Also Hersey, 1993:52.

¹³¹ See Borsook, 1990:xxi.

¹³² Made by sandwiching gold leaf between layers of glass; see Haswell, 1973:71.

¹³³ For instance, tesserae can be 'encrusted' rather than 'embedded' and set at angles which catch the available light. Shimmering effects and contrasts can be achieved by the use of different sized tesserae, set at different angles. Rhythms and patterns can be set up in the arrangement of the tesserae, even within areas of the same colour. See Haswell, 1973: 9, 14, 18, 25. Oakeshott suggests that the great skill of a mosaic artist is shown when they concern themselves "—not with line, but with light." Oakeshott, 1967:20.

¹³⁴ Compare with Lanfranco's altarpiece (1721–1726), also in St. Peter's, which takes a much more painterly and stormy approach to the scene.

for which the extensive use of gold tesserae to cover the background and for Christ's robes is certainly appropriate, if startling.¹³⁵

Description and Analysis

This mosaic is filled with figures. As well as Peter and Jesus and the disciples in the boat there are four figures in the heavens, two wind daemons, an angler and the donor, Cardinal Stefaneschi.¹³⁶ The ornate ship is particularly prominent, even allowing for the compression of the original composition, and it gives the mosaic its name, 'little ship'.¹³⁷ Each disciple's expression of fear and horror is unique and they are arranged in two ranks, one crouching and one standing so that every face is visible. The sense that this ship is not only the disciples' boat in the story but also a symbol—the ship of the Church¹³⁸—is confirmed when one sees that the steersman appears to be St. Paul, his hand firmly on the tiller.¹³⁹ The introduction of St. Paul brings a third layer of meaning to the image: firstly, there is the Gospel story; secondly, a layer of doctrinal symbolism; and thirdly a localised historical meaning which could be termed propaganda. Peter and Paul frame the group of disciples, even though Peter is approximately twice the size of Paul. The Christ figure carries a scroll; Peter and Paul and a frontal image of Christ bearing a scroll gives echoes of a particular doctrinal image, the *Traditio Legis*.¹⁴⁰ The presence of both Peter and Paul are also strong reminders of the proud heritage of the Roman church: built in the city where these two great apostles were martyred, the whole institution is both blessed (and legitimized) by continuity with their memory.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ See discussion of the tensions in Köhren-Jansen, 1993:134.

¹³⁶ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:13–14.

¹³⁷ This name is listed in the Basilica's necrology, where the cost is recorded as 2200 gold florins. Gardner, 1993:70.

¹³⁸ An allegorical connection made by Tertullian (*On Baptism*, ch. 9 and 11) and Augustine—see Sermon XXV (75), paragraphs 2 and 4.

¹³⁹ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:105. The figure at the tiller is not St. Paul in many of the early sketches made of Giotto's work, although he does appear on the 1628 cartoon.

¹⁴⁰ Means 'the giving of the law', with Christ in the role of the second Moses, establishing the new covenant. Christ gives the scroll to St. Peter on his right. St. Paul generally stands on Christ's left. Early examples are found on 4th and 5th century sarcophagae, but Köhren-Jansen has effectively demonstrated its persistence in apse decorations, etc., particularly in Rome; see plates 24–31.

¹⁴¹ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:133. He suggests that Peter and Paul follow in a long tradition of paired Roman figures, going back to Romulus and Remus. See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:105.

Of course, any image of Peter within the basilica named for him has multiple references to both the past and the present. In this image, his figure is the 'little faith' disciple of the gospels, but also the saint who continues to intercede for Rome; he is the leading apostle of the early Church, but also the first Bishop of Rome, continually authoritatively present in his successors. It is too simplistic to suggest that he is a purely allegorical figure, so that 'Peter' equals 'Pope';¹⁴² but it would be equally naive to assume that a monumental piece of art in this setting could be simply an illustration of the Gospel narrative. Story, doctrine and a type of propaganda are all part of this image.

The frontal figure of Christ, statuesque and clothed in gold, looks out at the viewer and makes no eye contact with any figure within the image. As Köhren-Jansen comments, the iconography of this figure of Christ owes more to Byzantine apse mosaics than to the known *oeuvre* of Giotto.¹⁴³ What is more, presenting Christ in this way frustrates several of Giotto's recognisable priorities in depicting a biblical scene. Eye contact,¹⁴⁴ dynamic physical movement,¹⁴⁵ and an intensity of dramatic action¹⁴⁶ are all hallmarks of his work. If one was asked to imagine a depiction by Giotto of Jesus rescuing Peter from the water, it would not be this one. However, there is no indication that the frontal figure of Christ is not original,¹⁴⁷ so it is possible that this iconography was specified in the commission. Yet whether the iconography came from Stefaneschi or Giotto, it is so unusual (and ungainly) in the context of this story that it merits closer inspection. Dramatic tension and physical naturalism must have been sacrificed for a reason.

A frontal figure of Christ, robed in gold in this way, is essentially an eschatological image. It is a heavenly figure of Christ, with all things under his feet.¹⁴⁸ It is both an image of a hidden present reality—Christ in heaven, and a promise of the reordering and restoration of all

¹⁴² D'Arcais comments on the overly intricate allegorical interpretations sometimes given; e.g. that the one oar represents the one spiritual power, the Pope. See D'Arcais, 1995:246.

¹⁴³ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:80.

¹⁴⁴ E.g. *The Nativity*, *The Lamentation*, (Cappella Scrovegni (Arena Chapel 1303–06), Padua).

¹⁴⁵ E.g. *The Ascension*, etc. Even such static motifs are transformed.

See Barasch, 1987:142–3.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. *The Kiss of Judas*. (Padua, 1304–06).

¹⁴⁷ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:276.

¹⁴⁸ He is sometimes standing on a globe, e.g. S. Giovanni in fonte, Naples. (Köhren-Jansen, 1993: Plate 27).

things. It appears most often in the apse, over the altar, and so over the celebration of the Mass.¹⁴⁹ Sometimes it is part of a multi-tiered presentation: beneath, Christ is shown as the Lamb of God, with the twelve apostles as sheep; above, he is this imposing and glorious heavenly figure, flanked by various saints, often including Peter and Paul (as in the *Traditio Legis*).¹⁵⁰ It is not a resurrection image, but a heavenly one. This impression is confirmed in this mosaic by the four heavenly figures who bear witness to the scene from the clouds.¹⁵¹ The artist has not transformed walking on the water into a resurrection story but brought eternity into time, straining the eschatological tensions of past, present and future to the limit.

In these apse representations of Christ, he holds a scroll in his left hand and holds up his right arm in an open-handed gesture. The *Navicella*'s Christ conforms to this pattern, except that he holds out his right arm to take Peter's fingers. The right arm is bent at the elbow and relaxed, however; no sign of physical strain animates the posture. As Barasch points out, the hand clasp itself is unusual,¹⁵² both within Giotto's *oeuvre* and within other images of a sinking Peter. It is more common for Jesus to grasp Peter's wrist or arm.¹⁵³ Barasch suggests that this hand clasp in the *Navicella* may owe something to the image of *restitutio* which appeared on imperial coinage: the Emperor extends his hand to a smaller figure (the Roman people) and bestows the gift of *libertas*.¹⁵⁴ Köhren-Jansen rejects this, asserting that the hand clasp is reminiscent of the iconography of the harrowing of hell or resurrection.¹⁵⁵ The hand clasp may also reflect the limits imposed by a frontal depiction of Christ: images where Christ is grasping Peter's

¹⁴⁹ E.g. Rome, S. Prassede, S. Giorgio in Velabro, etc. (Köhren-Jansen, 1993: Plates 30 and 32).

¹⁵⁰ E.g. Castel Sant'Elia, Sant'Anastasio. (Köhren-Jansen, 1993: Plate 31).

¹⁵¹ Cf. Köhren-Jansen, 1993:127, "Die Deutung der vier *Wolkengestalten* ist problematisch..." Suggestions include the Evangelists or some prophets—see discussion in Köhren-Jansen, 1993:127–128. What is certain is that they are saintly heavenly figures who point the viewer to an interpretation based in something other than this dramatic moment in the narrative.

¹⁵² See Barasch, 1987:131.

¹⁵³ See also Paeseler, 1941:142. Also Köhren-Jansen, 1993: Plates 14–17, 19, 20.

¹⁵⁴ See Barasch, 1987:131.

¹⁵⁵ Köhren-Jansen cites the Christ of the Resurrection in S. Maria Antiqua, Rome. The figure uses a similar gesture and also carries a scroll. See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:98, n. 116.

arm often show Christ in profile, sometimes bending towards Peter as he lifts him up.¹⁵⁶

In contrast, the overall effect here is one of power and serenity, but it is at the cost of any significant interaction with Peter. The viewer is not invited to identify with the encounter between Jesus and Peter as might be the case if they were looking at one another; instead, we are kept at a distance by Christ's majestic gaze looking out at us. We are invited to observe this encounter, not identify with it; we observe the bestowal of the hand of the heavenly Christ upon Peter, appearing to signify approval or affirmation as much as bringing rescue.

Peter's eyes are fixed on Christ and his expression conveys an intense petition for help, but not the abject panic of most of his fellow disciples. His large body and his arms reaching forward effectively fill the space between Christ and the ship of the church. It is hard to escape the conclusion that he has been positioned as mediator and intercessor.¹⁵⁷ What is often interpreted as a moment of failure¹⁵⁸ (when Peter gives way to fear and sinks) is here given the dignity of a moment of intercession and godly vulnerability.¹⁵⁹ κύριε, σῶσόν με has become an expression of faith, not of desperation; Peter's abortive walk on the water was the act of a courageous pioneer, not a presumptuous follower. Another layer of meaning is that the Pope, as the *vicarius Christi*,¹⁶⁰ will even venture into the dangerous sea for the sake of the Church; and because he holds the hand of the heavenly Christ while sharing the travail and vulnerability of the earthly Church, he in his own person unites heaven and earth.

A prayerful interpretation of this image is encouraged by the inscription attached to the 1628 cartoon:¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ E.g. the Navicella in the Spanish Chapel, S. Maria Novella, Florence. (Köhren-Jansen, 1993: Plate 51).

¹⁵⁷ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:133.

¹⁵⁸ E.g. Davies and Allison, 1991:509; also Luz, 1990:411 quoting Goethe, „—der Mensch durch Glauben und frischen Mut im schwierigsten Unternehmen siegen werde, dagegen bei anwandelndem geringsten Zweifel sogleich verloren sei.“

¹⁵⁹ Note that an image of humility can also be an image which legitimizes the status of the humble one. Jesus rescues Peter, but Peter is also singled out as the one Christ rescues. Cf. Trexler's comments on the use of the adoration of the Magi to legitimize kingship. Trexler, 1997:206.

¹⁶⁰ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:133.

¹⁶¹ Which may, or may not, have appeared below the original mosaic. See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:129–30. Paeseler, 1941: figure 55.

*QVEM LIQVIDOS PELAGI GRADIENTEM STERNERE FLVCTVS
IMPERITAS, FIDVMOQE REGIS, TREPIDVMOQE LABANTEM ERIGIS,
ET CELEBREM REDDIS VIRTVTIBVS ALMVM HOC IVBEAS ROGI-
TANTE DEUS CONTINGERE PORTVM.*¹⁶²

The emphasis is on the rescue and restoration of Peter. A connection is made between the danger Peter experienced and the struggles of all Christians before they 'reach harbour'.

The figures of the angler and the donor appear in the extreme foreground of the image; if they were on stage they would be on the apron. This gives the sense that they are connected with the scene and yet not directly part of it. Some scholars have suggested that the angler is a symbol of everyday life continuing even in the midst of crisis¹⁶³ but Köhren-Jansen's analysis that he is an early Christian symbol of mission is much more persuasive.¹⁶⁴ The presence of an entirely allegorical figure in the mosaic heightens the allegorical possibilities within the whole scene. The sea, for instance, is a natural part of the story, yet the presence of the angler suggests that it also represents the world. By contrast, the figure of Cardinal Stefaneschi is a wholly unallegorical figure: he appears as himself, piously praying and so offering as an act of devotion the work he has so generously paid for. There is a similar image of him as a pious donor on the Stefaneschi altarpiece (also believed to be by Giotto¹⁶⁵) which was also at St. Peter's. It seems likely that the figure of the Cardinal was originally kneeling on a spit of land opposite the angler,¹⁶⁶ rather than semi-submerged as he now appears. His presence in the water in the current mosaic certainly defies interpretation; his introduction into the image not as an observer but a participant implies a disturbing equivalence with St. Peter, which would

¹⁶² Oakeshott, 1967:330.

¹⁶³ E.g. Oakeshott, 1967:342–343.

¹⁶⁴ He refers to sarcophagæ, catacomb art (1st–2nd century) a font (11th–12th century) and a reliquary (13th century) to show how this imagery developed and persisted. See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:123–24. In the light of these examples, particularly Plate 23—a sarcophagus which shows both wind daemons, an angler and a ship, Köhren-Jansen's refutation of Paeseler's understanding of the origins of the *Navicella* is persuasive; Paeseler argues that these antique elements must come from early Christian images of the *Navicella* itself which were the direct sources for Giotto's work. (See Paeseler, 1941:134, 160). Köhren-Jansen demonstrates that an alternative explanation is possible.

¹⁶⁵ See Gardner, 1993:103.

¹⁶⁶ All the early sketches of the *Navicella* which show a donor figure show him on land. See Köhren-Jansen, 1993: plates 79, 80, 81, 82.

have been neither desired nor permitted. Perhaps it was simply lack of space which necessitated the present head and shoulders portrait?

The combination of gospel story and eschatological imagery stretch the integrity of this mosaic to the limit. Yet the *Navicella* depicts the only biblical narrative which potentially combines these three chosen elements: a symbol of the Church in danger, the power of Christ and a unique role for Peter.

Benefits for Interpretation

Köhren-Jansen persuasively argues that the *Navicella* is a legitimization of the Papacy and the Papacy's foundation in Rome.¹⁶⁷ This indirectly issues a challenge for western Protestants like myself: is the protestant interpretation of Peter's actions as hasty, presumptuous and foolish any less of a legitimization, this time designed to undermine any credibility for claims about Peter's primacy? Are western discussions of Peter always coloured by a hidden affirmation or refutation of the Papacy?

Mt 14:22–33 is silent about Peter's motive for wanting to walk on the water and Christ's for responding to his request. The question of whether Peter is foolhardy or brave, presumptuous or devoted is left for the readers to decide. The *Navicella* has portrayed Peter as brave and devoted, and nothing in the text actually contradicts this. Jesus does rebuke Peter in verse 31, however; yet it is specifically for doubting, not for walking. Is the gesture with which Christ lifts up Peter in the *Navicella* consistent with this rebuke? If Köhren-Jansen's point that the hand clasp resembles Roman images of the harrowing of hell is accepted, then perhaps it is: raising Peter from doubt to faith could mirror raising the dead to life.

When the disciples see Christ, walking on the sea, they cry out, φάντασμα ἔστιν (verse 26), presumably disturbed by this apparently impossible action. No mention is made of his appearance. Therefore Christ's symbolically gold garments in the *Navicella* do appear to be an adaptation of the story beyond the detail of the text. Christ as a heavenly figure—risen, ascended and glorified—breaks the chronology of the Matthean pericope which belongs to the middle period of Jesus' ministry.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ See Köhren-Jansen, 1993:82–83, 282.

¹⁶⁸ There are precedents for this, however: see Augustine's Sermon LXXV, "It signifies then, that now in the end of the world the Lord is come to help (*quod jam in*

Yet the effect of this majestic frontal figure of Christ is part of the beneficial challenge which this work offers. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, depictions of this story tend to focus on the relationship between Jesus and Peter. Their intense encounter fills the foreground of many pictures and the disciples, if portrayed at all, are shadowy figures in the background. The significant focus of these pictures is a personal rescue.¹⁶⁹ The Navicella, on the other hand, in both its name and its composition gives full weight to the presence of the other disciples. If it emphasizes a particular view of Peter's supremacy, this is only possible because it defines him in relation to the group of disciples and not as an individual. This draws our attention to the communal confession of faith which concludes Matthew's narrative.

LUIS BORRASSÁ ST PETER IS WALKING ON THE WATER
(1411–13. TEMPERA ON WOOD. 102 × 65 CM)

The altarpiece of San Pedro, painted for the church of Santa Maria de Tarrasa, has eight panels which celebrate the Saint's life, including the delivery of Peter from prison by an angel, the raising of Tabitha, Peter's confrontation with Simon Magus, his enthronement as Pope, his martyrdom and this panel showing an encounter between Jesus and Peter.

In the Context of Tradition

Borrassá's work falls into the period of art known as Gothic. The term 'Gothic', however, is fraught with difficulties. It was originally a retrospective and dismissive term for all medieval art; Vasari and his contemporaries judged all art that was non-classical and pre-renaiss-

fine saeculi subvenit Dominus), and is seen to walk upon the waters (*ambulare super aquas*). For though this ship be tossed about by the storms of temptations, yet she sees her Glorified God (*glorificatum Deum*) walking above all the swellings of the sea (*omnes tumores maris*); that is, above all the principalities of this world (*omnes hujus saeculi principatus*).” A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Vol. VI. Sermon XXV, para. 7. Latin from *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Augustinus V Sermones, Sermo LXXV, Caput VI*.

¹⁶⁹ See also Luz, 1990:409, “Matthäus appliziert die Seewandelgeschichte nicht ekklesiologisch, sondern auf den einzelnen Christen.”

sance 'Gothic' and so beneath their notice.¹⁷⁰ Even if this pejorative implication is overcome, the term 'Gothic' remains a very slippery one. It is required to span a wide band of history from the mid-twelfth to the sixteenth century and to cover all the different patterns of stylistic development which took place in the different countries of Europe throughout this period.¹⁷¹ It acquired this scope by what Martindale describes as '—a rather unsatisfactory process of elimination':¹⁷² it became a bridging term for all art and architecture between the Romanesque and Renaissance periods.

In terms of 'Gothic' subcategories, Borrassá's work can be described as being in the 'international Gothic' style.¹⁷³ This term describes the common features discernible in different types of artefacts¹⁷⁴ right across Europe in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century. Stylistic innovations in art usually start in a particular country or city, but international Gothic is so-called because it seemed to develop simultaneously in a number of different centres across Europe and involved a synthesis of the Italian style of representing figures (cf. Duccio) and the Northern European emphasis on detail and decoration. The result is images which often combine naturalistic details¹⁷⁵ with lavish and heraldic splendour.¹⁷⁶ It is as if an increasing desire for naturalistic figures and scenery is combined with a nostalgia for the heraldic and the fantastic. Huizinga describes it as a symptom of the waning of the Middle Ages; a spiralling descent into ever-increasing detail embroidered on worn-out medieval ideas.¹⁷⁷ Others have seen

¹⁷⁰ See Vasari's Preface to the Lives of the Artists, which begins with Creation, describes a peak of classical artistic achievement and then the devastation caused by 'savage and barbarian invaders' leading to art 'totally lacking in grace, design and judgment'. Vasari, 1987:27–47.

¹⁷¹ For instance, Simon suggests that French Gothic had a later impact in Spain because Romanesque art there had been enlivened with Islamic motifs and so was a still developing tradition at a much later date than was so in other parts of Europe. See Simon, 1993:203.

¹⁷² Martindale, 1967:7. He acknowledges the disadvantages of the term 'Gothic' even though he chose it for the title of his book—*Gothic Art*.

¹⁷³ See Gudiol's comment that Borrassá introduced this style to Catalonia. Gudiol, 1964:153.

¹⁷⁴ E.g. Altarpieces, illuminated manuscripts, small painted images for personal devotional use.

¹⁷⁵ E.g. the first shadow cast by a figure in *Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry*—October (1412–16). See Panofsky, 1953:57–59.

¹⁷⁶ E.g. see *Madonna with Angels playing Music and Donor* (1439) by an Unknown Spanish Master.

¹⁷⁷ See Huizinga, 1979:263.

it as the forerunner to the Renaissance.¹⁷⁸ It is certainly a style which emerges during a period of transition.¹⁷⁹

Description and Analysis of the Painting

This particular work of Borrassá's has none of the ornate flourishes such as heraldic images or elaborate drapery which characterize some works of this period. It does, however, have some of the naturalistic details which international gothic style is noted for: the boats, oars, Peter's robes under the water, the foliage and rocks on the shore and the movement of the water all exhibit a careful use of light and shade and attention to naturalistic detail.

The background figures are smaller than the foreground figures, in the way that one would expect in a naturalistic depiction, but there is one exception to this: the relative size of St Andrew and the fisherman sitting with him in the foreground boat. This is not a dramatic departure from naturalistic depiction, as occurs in some paintings of this period,¹⁸⁰ but St Andrew's head is noticeably larger than that of his companion. One of the characteristic interests of the gothic art of this period is the portrayal of peasant life in greater detail than had been attempted earlier, but within a framework that maintained the social hierarchy; so peasants and servants were smaller figures, sometimes with coarser features, sometimes depicted in a way which ridiculed them.¹⁸¹ In this painting, they are simply depicted as hard at work fishing, wearing dark robes. Two of them wear distinctive hats. One feels that it is their job to ensure that the catch is brought in, and they have little

¹⁷⁸ See Camille, 1996:14.

¹⁷⁹ See Gombrich, 1970:147–162, in which he describes the various different theories of the relationship between Renaissance and Gothic art put forward by Aby Warburg: that Gothic art was a hostile force for Renaissance art to overcome, or a catalyst for it, or an ally for its development; e.g. see p. 162, “Warburg was fully aware of the fact that the realism *alla francese* was part of that international Gothic style which dominated the first half of the fifteenth century. Compared with the austere grandeur of a Masaccio or a Donatello, it was indeed reactionary, but was it not nevertheless a symptom of that zest for life, that joy in the sensuous beauty of the world, which we usually associate with the Renaissance?”

¹⁸⁰ For a much clearer example, see *Madonna with Angels playing Music and Donor* (1439), where the figure of the kneeling patron is painted with an individual facial expression, yet is a fraction of the size of the Virgin. Panofsky describes this tendency as having naturalistic skills but lacking naturalistic values. See Panofsky, 1953:60.

¹⁸¹ See Panofsky, 1953:65–6, where he suggests that these artists always depict, not just a man ploughing, but a *poor* man ploughing.

time for the adoring encounter taking place in the foreground. Only the most distant figure in the second boat glances towards Jesus, but even he simultaneously reaches out his left arm to catch hold of the oar which is in danger of working loose and drifting away. In contrast, St Andrew has taken his hands away from the oars altogether and does not show any concern for the practicalities of the work.

In size, clothing and concentration of activity, there is a clear distinction between Peter, Andrew and Jesus and the group of working fishermen. This is further emphasized by the gilded haloes of the three which form a strong compositional triangle. It is this distinction between disciple and fishermen which suggests that this is a picture of the calling of Peter and Andrew (cf. Mt 4:18–20), rather than the resurrection appearance on the shore, which would involve more disciples.

Jesus' left hand is held up in a formal gesture of blessing. This is typical of Borrassá's depictions of Jesus: in the Retable of Gardiola, for instance, each scene from the life of Christ includes this gesture, with the exception of the betrayal and crucifixion. Jesus' face is much lighter in skin tone than the other figures. Jesus' right hand seems gently to encircle Peter's fingers; this is not a grip which could lift Peter from the water. Peter does not seem concerned about this, however, since he has only reached out one hand to Jesus and this hand is held palm upwards—more a gesture of adoration than panic. His left hand grasps his own right arm. Peter's gaze is fixed on Jesus with the same wondering rapture that Andrew shows, but the expression is accentuated by the tipping back of his head to gaze up at Jesus.

Interestingly, the posture and hand gestures of the figure of Peter were perhaps copied by another unknown artist of the school of Borrassá, and used for a figure in a quite different scene: one of the Magi in an adoration of the Magi (now in the Diocesan Museum of Tarragona).¹⁸² The fact that this posture appears appropriate in this quite other narrative setting underlines that the relative postures of Jesus and Peter in this painting convey adoration and acceptance, rather than panic and rescue. If Peter is to be imagined uttering the Matthean words, "Lord, save me!" then in Borrassá's eyes, it is not from the physical danger of the water that he seeks to be saved.

¹⁸² See Post, 1930, vol. 3:119, Fig. 296.

Benefits for Interpretation

The question does arise as to whether this painting showing boats, Peter in the water and Jesus on the shore has anything to do with Mt 14:22–33. There is no night storm, this is a fishing trip; and neither Peter nor Jesus are walking on the water. The only possible link is Jesus taking Peter's hand while Peter is in the water, and yet this does not really resemble the desperate moment of Mt. 14:30–1. This picture has been included in this study primarily because of its title: in the Web Gallery of Art¹⁸³ it is entitled *St Peter is Walking on the Water*, a title which immediately claims a link with the Matthean story, but which is a strange choice, because the one action that Peter is not doing in this picture is walking on the water. In his book, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger comments on the power of captions and titles to impose meaning on images to the point where,

—the image now illustrates the sentence.¹⁸⁴

This seems to have been the case with this picture. As a panel of a larger altarpiece, it will have been created as a narrative without a title, but at some point in its history it acquired this association with Mt 14:22–33. In a study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this text, it thus becomes a highly significant 'effect': not necessarily because Borrassá intended it as a reflection on this narrative, but because art historians¹⁸⁵ have been so sure that the postures of Jesus and Peter are intended to evoke this story. This can only mean that they associate the whole narrative with the single moment that Jesus takes Peter's hand to rescue him. This confirms the prevalence of the modern western focus on the moment of rescue discussed in relation to the fresco at Dura.

¹⁸³ See Web Gallery of Art, <www.kfki.hu>. Its creators, Emil Kren and Daniel Marx describe its purpose in these terms: "Fundamentally, we treat this site as a topical site of the Renaissance art which originated in the Italian city-states of the 14th century and flourished and spread to other countries in the 15th and 16th centuries. Our intention is to present this period as fully as possible, embedded in its historical environment, showing its Byzantine and Gothic roots from the 13th and 14th centuries as well as its evolution to Baroque via Mannerism in the 16th and 17th centuries."

Gudiol, a noted expert on Spanish art chooses to call it *Christ and St. Peter*, a much more cautious title. See Gudiol, 1964:156–7, Fig. 84.

¹⁸⁴ Berger, 1972:28. See also Berger, 1972:26–29.

¹⁸⁵ E.g. Lassigne, 1952:46–47.

WALKING ON WATER BY CHRISTINA SAJ¹⁸⁶
(1997, OIL ON WOOD, 18" × 24")

This work is a much newer part of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Mt 14:22–33. It was painted by the New Jersey artist Christina Saj in 1997. Saj trained at the Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts at Bard College, and also studied in Italy and at Oxford, and with the icon painter Petro Cholidny for three years. She is now a full-time artist who gives regular exhibitions, fulfills commissions and makes international sales through her own website. Her style reflects both aspects of her training—a use of abstract form and colour which draws on the heritage of early twentieth-century modern art, and a use of some of the forms, conventions and themes of icon painting.

This combination is startling. The cultural and theological values of early abstract painters¹⁸⁷ and the painters of Orthodox icons are so different from one another. Interestingly, both traditions do share a consciously spiritual aim, to take the viewer into a supersensory experience, or to evoke a response of silent awe or prayer. Yet the two traditions share little agreement about the nature of the spiritual realm nor about how someone might be alerted to its reality. Their understanding of the significance of biblical narratives is often so different as to be antagonistic.¹⁸⁸ To bring together abstract and Orthodox traditions is to bring together east and west, ancient and modern. Saj's great achievement is to create a kind of synthesis between these traditions, rather than simply borrow motifs or techniques from each. To explore how she does this, we need first to delineate the stark contrasts and hidden affinities between these two artistic traditions.

Figurative versus Non-figurative

Perhaps the clearest contrast between abstract art and Orthodox icons is the presence and absence of figures. Icons are images of people; the

¹⁸⁶ Illustration 6.

¹⁸⁷ Particularly those of the early C20th, e.g. Kandinsky, Mondrian, Rothko, Newman, etc.

¹⁸⁸ The Orthodox assert that these narratives are both historical (they happened) and eternal (they continue to affect the way the world is). See Ouspensky and Lossky, 1989:44, 54. Abstract artists tend to treat them as archetypal myths expressing fundamental psychological truths. Rothko describes them as “—eternal symbols upon which we must fall back to express basic psychological ideas.” Rothko, 1996:81.

figures are usually gazing outwards, often directly at the viewer. They are rarely depicted in profile.¹⁸⁹ Details of landscape and other incidental details which help to identify the narrative being depicted are kept to a stylized minimum.¹⁹⁰ The icons provide contact with the unseen world of the spirit through these images of glorified saints, the Mother of God and the Word made flesh. These images reveal the eternal reality behind events which happened in time; they point to the unseen prototypes who people heaven, ever ready to listen and respond to the prayers and veneration of those who live on earth. An icon without a figure is unthinkable; an iconostasis is peopled with patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints as well as the image of Christ himself.¹⁹¹

Abstract art, on the other hand, is by definition non-figurative since it depicts no recognisable scenes or objects.¹⁹² Kandinsky, in his work *On the Spiritual in Art*, suggests that Jews, Protestants and Catholics and others who follow institutional religions actually rate rather poorly in spiritual awareness and have little to contribute to the spiritual development of humankind. Consequently, he assessed their figurative art in the same terms, especially if he saw it as motivated by convention rather than faith.¹⁹³ He asserted that the real spiritual power of a work of art was in its 'inner aspect' and that narrative and representation were a distraction from the vibrations given through form and colour which nourish the spirit.¹⁹⁴ A later abstract¹⁹⁵ artist, Mark Rothko, expressed another motive for abandoning the figurative:

¹⁸⁹ See Ouspensky, 1992a:79, 187. The image is in communion with the viewer.

¹⁹⁰ See Ouspensky, 1992a:78. He describes this as a form of 'frugality', analogous with the sparse narrative detail of Scripture.

¹⁹¹ See Ouspensky, 1992b:279. "In Orthodox theology and devotion alike, Christ is never separated from His Mother, the Theotokos, and His 'friends', the saints. The Redeemer and the redeemed belong together inseparably."

¹⁹² See Oxford Dictionary of Art, entry 'Abstract Art'.

¹⁹³ See Kandinsky's triangle of spiritual awareness, Kandinsky, 1955:27. His relationship with Russian Orthodoxy was a little more complex, since he always had an affection for 'mother church'. See Long, 1984:45.

¹⁹⁴ See Kandinsky, 1955:25, 75.

¹⁹⁵ It should be noted that Rothko disliked being categorized as an abstract artist, because he felt that his non-representational art intensified the expression of his subject rather than diluting it into a formal colour-space arrangement. See Clearwater, 1996:87. His art is abstract in the sense of having no recognisable scenes or objects, however.

It was with the utmost reluctance that I found the figure could not serve my purposes... But a time came when none of us could use the figure without mutilating it.¹⁹⁶

It is perhaps significant that Rothko ceased to paint figures at the time of the second world war. We can hear in his words a particularly modern, post-holocaust distress.¹⁹⁷ There is nothing of this angst in the Orthodox tradition of painting because the artists are confident in a theological understanding of how the eternal became flesh at the Incarnation. This means that our human flesh has the potential to be transformed and glorified, sharing the divine nature.¹⁹⁸ The Mother of God and the saints have already reached this perfection. This all-embracing understanding of reality both precedes and supersedes the accidents and horrors of human history. Ouspensky and Lossky describe the purpose of icons as to present answers to life's problems, not to depict the problems themselves.¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, one could characterize much abstract spiritual art as depicting existential questions.²⁰⁰

Painting as Spiritual Communication

These fundamental differences of approach would make it difficult for an abstract painter and an icon painter to acknowledge one another as fellow travellers with a spiritual destination.²⁰¹ The responses of those who view their works are sometimes uncannily similar, however, particularly in terms of prayer.²⁰² Both icons and abstract works seek to elicit a response of silent surrender from the viewer. Jackson Pollock said that people should, "not look for, but look passively," at his works;²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ Excerpt from notes taken at a lecture by Mark Rothko at the Pratt Institute. Published in an article by Dore Ashton in *The New York Times*, 31st October, 1958. Quoted from Clearwater, 1996:86.

¹⁹⁷ See Moszynska, 1990:164–5.

¹⁹⁸ As Ouspensky expresses it. "God became man so that man could become God." Ouspensky, 1992:48.

¹⁹⁹ See Ouspensky and Lossky, 1989:27.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Newman's *Stations of the Cross*, where each 'station' is a depiction of 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabactani'.

²⁰¹ See Ouspensky's comments about Matisse and artists whose work is non-figurative. He asserts that their works cannot be a Bible for the unlettered nor a source of spiritual instruction but only appreciated in purely aesthetic terms. Ouspensky, 1992b:213.

²⁰² Eg. see Ouspensky, 1992a:181, "—the icon is both a means and a path to follow. It is itself a prayer." And Bowl, 1984:33, quoting a viewer's comment concerning Kandinsky's works, "We don't understand them at all, but they do give us the feeling of being inside a church."

²⁰³ Moszynska, 1990:152.

Kandinsky was scornful of critics who only read, but do not see.²⁰⁴ Ouspensky says that icons are, “—as it were a pictorial expression of the Cherubic Hymn sung on Holy Saturday: ‘Let all human flesh keep silence...and lift itself above all earthly thought.’”²⁰⁵ Common to both traditions is this sense that a painting offers an encounter with the eternal, in which the viewers are the impoverished partners who must surrender what they think they know in order to receive a truer revelation.

Description and Analysis

This picture shows a single figure walking on, and among, a number of differently coloured stylized wave shapes. The figure and the waves are painted onto a geometric grid background, composed of small rounded dark blue crosses with regular spacing between them. The grid is visible through areas of blue, green and gold as well as in the top righthand area of the work where it is less overpainted and appears as blue crosses on a white background, setting up two powerful sets of pale regular diagonal lines at right angles to one another which travel through the composition. There are three eight petalled star shapes, two in green areas of the painting, and one in the area where the grid is predominantly blue and white. There is a dark turquoise translucent band right across the painting, slightly below the midpoint. The eye of the viewer is drawn to the powerful symmetry of the red and silver circles of the figure’s head and the similar red tone of the shapes within the figure’s body.

The colours are bright and many layered, giving a highly decorative effect. Some are translucent, permitting us to see four or five layers of colour at once, others are more uniform blocks of opaque colour but often revealing, on closer inspection, subtle variations in tone and texture. Some textures are achieved with visible brush strokes, others by a spray technique.

The gently curving stance of the figure is reminiscent of many icon figures and through this association conveys a graceful, gentle and steady movement from left to right as one looks at the painting. The outer red circle corresponds to the position of the halo on such an icon figure. The inner red disk, small and with the same centre point, is in

²⁰⁴ See Bowlt, 1984:3.

²⁰⁵ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1989:127.

close relationship with the outer red circle and suggests an integrity and wholeness of personality—what this person is on the outside so they are at the centre. The silver circle between the two is key to this total relationship, the shape reiterating the harmony and balance, the colour, a swirl of silver and blue with eight faint pink dots, introducing a new element of vulnerability and volatility.

These circles and the space between them form the compelling focal point of the work. As Kandinsky expressed it:

A circle is always something.
Sometimes even very much.
Sometimes—rarely—too much.
As a rhinoceros is sometimes too much.²⁰⁶

A circle is always something and a red circle, which in Kandinsky's terms, 'glows within itself'²⁰⁷ engages the viewer powerfully through the relation of form and colour. These circles communicate serenity and call for contemplation just as the face on an icon does, and yet they communicate with the viewer so differently. It is remarkable that these circles, in combination with the blue shapes which suggest the body of the figure are so evocative of stance and character. When Lossky and Ouspensky discuss the depiction of the saints on icons, they make these observations:

The faces of the saints are not stern. Their attraction lies in their serene 'immobility'; at the same time it is hard to decide which gives a greater impression of forward movement—the body, the hands outstretched in prayer or the eyes.²⁰⁸

Saj has given her figure serene immobility and forward movement without depicting the eyes or the hands and with only a suggestion of the body. This is truly an icon in another language, which Saj terms "modern vernacular."²⁰⁹

The body of the figure has another prominent feature: rib-like shapes in varying tones of red. In earlier works such as *Homage to Matisse* (1991)

²⁰⁶ "Ein Kreis ist immer etwas.

Manchmal sogar veil.

Manchmal—selten—zuveil.

Wie ein Nashorn manchmal zu veil ist." Kandinsky, 1955:86–87.

²⁰⁷ See Kandinsky, 1955:61.

²⁰⁸ Ouspensky and Lossky, 1989:127.

²⁰⁹ See Peterson, *Star-Ledger*, March 1994. <http://www.christinasaj.com/gallery/9404_ContemporaryIcons.html>.

Saj used actual X-rays in her compositions, but now she tends to incorporate shapes which make reference to bones instead.²¹⁰ Skeletal bone structures have become a powerful symbol within her work connecting the modern and the ancient. X-ray images of living bodies are, of course, a modern achievement. As Saj expresses it, they can—

—gesture towards everyone's body, can address the human figure from the inside out, while at the same time they can refer to somebody's body in particular. Using them in my art I hope to portray the essence of the human spirit while addressing the particular selves who are giving an audience to my icons.²¹¹

At the same time, bones call to mind ancient reliquaries and ossaries, so that X-ray images become a link between “Byzantium and modern medicine”,²¹² between ordinary people and saints.

In a traditional icon of Christ walking on the water the depiction of the water itself would be stylized and repetitive, its formal appearance merely an indication of the context of the miracle.²¹³ The sea in this painting is considerably more complex. Although the waves are painted in a stylized manner, they are in six different colours including cream, brown and gold, with additional shades and textures. There are also translucent and opaque areas of blue and green which interact with the wave shapes in the depiction of the water. The shapes and forms which evoke the water are to either side and in front of the figure and fill more than half of the composition. The stance of the figure suggests that it is walking, not sinking, but the nature of the water makes the task of walking appear emotionally and physically demanding. In particular, the translucent curve of turquoise (which begins in a dark almost crenellated area to the left of the figure, moves across the front of the figure and to the righthand edge of the panel) is perhaps not water at all, but some kind of misty darkness. Is this the remains of the night, being dispelled by the rising sun, (the eight-petalled yellow and red star)? Or is it something internal to the figure's own struggle?

The grid pattern itself underlies the whole image, coming into sharp focus in some areas, blurring in others, disappearing behind opaque

²¹⁰ For instance, see Illustrations 7 and 8.

²¹¹ Saj, 1997. <http://www.christinasaj.com/library/9710_GhostsOfByzantium.html>

²¹² Saj, 1997. <http://www.christinasaj.com/library/9710_GhostsOfByzantium.html>

²¹³ Compare, for instance, the waves on traditional icons of St. Nicholas.

shapes only to re-emerge in another part of the picture. When compared with the serene constancy of the gold background of an icon, this grid suggests permeability and movement. The wind or the water may rush through the spaces between the crosses at any moment. It is cool and open, and yet a stable, constant structure. It is insistent in its regularity and presses through the water, the large area of gold on the left and even through the body of the figure. It asserts itself as the overall pattern of the image but is held in check by the waves, the yellow, red and orange shape and by the figure's head and ribs. In these areas, reality is transfigured.

Christina Saj has created an icon in the modern vernacular. She has combined the serenity of an icon figure with the edgy ambiguity of an abstract expression focussed on form and colour. She has created an image with tremendous presence, yet with hints of vulnerability and struggle. She has creatively combined two spiritual artistic traditions and through them expressed a Christian narrative in a way which is neither kitsch pastiche nor nostalgic reference but a 'meant' religious symbol. It is an intriguing postmodern achievement that has broken the bounds of each tradition (an abstract painting with a figure in it, an icon without a face) yet preserved and combined something of the heart of them.²¹⁴

Benefits for Interpretation

The painting is of one figure alone; there is no boat with disciples in it and no interaction between Jesus and Peter. So who is the lone figure in this painting, Jesus or Peter? The title of the work leaves this issue open, and this is in keeping with Christina Saj's expressed intention to make this figure a "universal symbol" of her "reinvented mythology."²¹⁵ However, there is a case to be made that this is Peter. The curved stance of the figure recalls the stance of the saints, particularly on an iconostasis, as they move with reverence towards a central figure of Christ the Saviour. It is not impossible that a figure of Christ would

²¹⁴ Christina Saj confirms this interpretation. She commented in a personal E-mail (15.5.2003), "Naturally, in of the world of contemporary art, not everyone is a student of Byzantium or Scripture, and so much of the resonance the work is meant to have is simply lost on the audience. Thus, my focus cannot help but feel arcane. It gives me hope that across the ocean, the work has resonated with someone who really gets it."

²¹⁵ See catalogue for her exhibition . *Remembering Myth* (September 1997) <http://www.christinasaj.com/gallery/9709_RememberingMyth.html>.

move with this particular elegant humility, but it is less likely. There are also none of the specific identifying signs which always surround a figure of Christ on a traditional icon. These include a cruciform halo and the letters 'IC' and 'XC' either side of the figure.²¹⁶ Of course, Saj is not bound to include these elements when working in her own vernacular, but she does tend to include a clear cruciform shape of some kind in her specific representations of Christ, which she has not done here.²¹⁷

Whether this is Peter or Jesus or some more universal figure, the fact that it is solitary takes the viewer into a different aspect of this narrative. It is no longer about an encounter; or rather, it is an encounter between the viewer and the figure, not between master and disciple. This could conceivably be a depiction of Mt 14:29b, but it is shorn of the narrative shock of Peter beginning this miraculous action in imitation of his master, and of the disaster which follows. This means that it raises none of the questions about motive, about faith, doubt, presumption and achievement, which are usually prompted by a depiction of Peter's actions. The questions about faith which this image raises are about the actual experience of walking on water and what it could symbolize, not the achievement or failure of a miracle. The experience itself is appropriated as a mythic resource for the viewer to use in reflecting on their own journey through life. The painting is designed for individuals to contemplate, not necessarily guided by religious tradition, but by their own experiences.

It perhaps owes something to the postmodern mindset which prompted the placing of a clear platform on the sea of Galilee so that visitors could walk out on it and imagine themselves walking on the water. This is a colourful and playful process of entering into a narrative and identifying with it, almost regardless of its historical and theological implications. By comparison, how conservative and austere appears the nineteenth century categorization of this story as a myth! Then it was seen as a myth expressing Christological ideas, now it is a mythic resource for whatever path an individual is pursuing. Yet this postmodern receptivity to mystery has made possible again a devotional image of Peter walking rather than sinking—the first, as far as I have been able to discover, since the middle ages.

²¹⁶ Illustration 9.

²¹⁷ E.g. Illustrations 10 and 11.

Returning to Matthew's text, I am struck by an immediate contrast with this painting: the importance of dialogue and relationships. While the actions in the story are extraordinary, and the landscape and seascape are described in uncharacteristic detail for Matthew, it is the relationships, the dialogue and the confession which make this pericope what it is. It is in the direct speech that Matthew reintroduces his theme of ὀλιγόπιστος (verse 31) and the important confession ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ (verse 33).

This painting uses the story of walking on the water as a resource for meditation. It takes one moment in the story, interestingly almost the same moment as the Dura fresco, and transforms it into a visual metaphor which can be endlessly reinterpreted by the viewer. In this, it differs from a traditional icon which has a fixed meaning within Church tradition. Nevertheless, this painting is deeply rooted in the living tradition of icon painting and so does not trivialize what it depicts. It draws deeply on centuries of devotion to the saints, including Saint Peter.

It is also deeply rooted in the abstract quest to express the unseen through form and colour, and to represent problems and questions as well as glory and joy. This serene yet sad figure of Peter is neither impetuous nor doubting, and leads us further into a consideration of Peter's motives and character in Matthew's story. Perhaps Christina Saj's painting, along with the *Navicella*, offer new resources from outside a Protestant tradition for reflecting on Peter's character and motivations in this pericope. Her interpretation cannot be definitive, of course, but it can stand alongside other attempts to encapsulate the story—such as Held's conclusion that this pericope is about a disciple “auf dem Weg der Nachfolge”,²¹⁸ or Gundry's that it is essentially about keeping faith during persecution.²¹⁹ There is something in the stillness of this devotional image that invites us to look again, and to consider seeking the meaning of the story within the texture of the narrative, rather than in a secondary and abstract statement about faith and doubt.

CONCLUSION

One of the advantages of examining visual 'effects' is their inevitable commitment to a particular 'encapsulating moment'. The Master of

²¹⁸ See Held in Bornkamm, Barth and Held, 1960:195.

²¹⁹ See Gundry, 1982:298–300.

Cabestany's bas-relief, the Dura fresco and Christina Saj's painting all present new encapsulating moments for this narrative. What happens if one focusses on the moment that Peter is walking rather than sinking? Or on the moment that he shows himself willing to leave the boat? These, too, are significant points in Matthew's narrative, all too often overshadowed in interpretations that centre on the moment of Peter's rescue. The title given to Borrassá's work on the basis of the single motif of the hand clasp and the continued insistence by scholars that the Dura 'Peter' is sinking illustrate this singleminded preoccupation. As soon as Peter speaks to Jesus and leaves the boat, Matthew's narrative ceases to be a simple epiphanic episode and thus breaks the bounds of the Markan and Johannine pericopae. It is a shocking moment for the reader, and focussing on Peter's rescue is one way of rehabilitating this story so that it more closely resembles other miracles. The great strength of these works of art is that they refuse to allow us to move on so quickly.

The *Navicella*, the work by Duccio and Christina Saj's painting all offer portrayals of Peter which challenge the view that he is impulsive and presumptuous. Duccio's Peter is consumed with wholehearted devotion to the Risen Christ. The Peter of the *Navicella* is vulnerable and sinking yet full of pioneering faith that the Glorified Christ will raise him up. Saj's Peter travels a sad and difficult path with faithfulness. Matthew offers no description of Peter's thoughts or motivations in this pericope but leaves him to be judged by his words and actions. The literary critical examination revealed that he emerges from the collective character "the disciples" and then re-merges with it. It is therefore possible to see Matthew's Peter in the kind of representative role he holds in the *Navicella*, even though the Papal overtones clearly belong to a much later period of history. But are western readers, Protestant or Catholic, ever really free to consider Peter except in affirmation or contradiction of Papal tradition? A work like the *Navicella*, which so clearly makes use of the narrative almost like a billboard advertisement, highlights the contextual issues in all our interpretations.

These works offer a variety of portraits of Jesus. The figure of Jesus in the Dura fresco is sufficiently similar to the figure of Peter to allow the continuing dispute over their identification. Jesus is a fellow traveller, robed in white as Peter is; he is not distinguished by any indications of glory but only by some robes of human authority—the chiton and himation—perhaps suggesting that he is modelled on the figure of

a philosopher.²²⁰ He is known by his miraculous actions, not by his appearance. Giotto's Christ, by contrast, sparkles in eschatological glory and promises a rescue with a much wider scope than the momentary relief of Peter's plight. The Christ in the Master of Cabestany's work is a similarly impressive figure with a frontal pose, but is marked out by his message of peace as the resurrected Christ. His gesture is not a greeting or a helping hand, but a blessing. Duccio's Christ bears the gold striation of glory, but gestures to Peter as he did when he first called him to be a disciple. The range of these images could suggest three different Christological perspectives on this story: Jesus the miracle-worker, Jesus the resurrected one and Jesus the exalted figure from heaven. They complement the similarly wide range of interpretations made by historical critics²²¹ and raise the question of the range of associations, both forwards and backwards in the Gospel story, which Matthew intended to evoke.

Although these works are largely unconnected by tradition or context, a faint trend of interpretation does begin to emerge. Earlier images give attention to the presence and reactions of disciples other than Peter (e.g. Dura, Master of Cabestany, Duccio, the *Navicella*); in these works the events of the narrative are a communal experience. Nineteenth and twentieth-century illustrations focus only on the encounter between Jesus and Peter, making it a story about personal faith. Christina Saj has made it a story about a solitary figure, which puts the stress on individual experience. The journey from communal, to personal, to solitary, echoes general changes in the nature of Christian spirituality in western societies. All three approaches provide possible ways of reflecting on this pericope, but the collective confession (14:33) which concludes Matthew's story suggests that we must be prepared to take a retrospective cultural journey back to a communal understanding if we are to appreciate the fulness of Matthew's text.

These images have provided a range of interpretative insights into the portrayal of Jesus, Peter and their relationship to the wider group of disciples. Perhaps most significantly, they have exposed a modern

²²⁰ There is no standard representation of Jesus in art of this period, and the Dura artist does not even depict Jesus in the same way in the different frescoes within the one Baptistery: here he is a white robed figure, behind the baptismal laver he is the Good Shepherd, a figure reminiscent of depictions of Hercules.

²²¹ E.g. Jesus as "divine man", Betz, 1968:119; the pericope as a misplaced resurrection account, see Maddon, 1997:116–130; etc.

western preconception that the most important moment in this story is Peter sinking and being rescued, rather than Peter being called and walking on the water. This preconception was one of my own unconscious prejudices which was left undisturbed by an examination of the work of New Testament critics, only coming to light through reflection on these works of art.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This project began with a consideration of Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics. Gadamer highlights the importance of becoming aware of our own historical situation as readers within a tradition. It is unsafe to assume that we can neutralize our own historicity with the methodologically disciplined use of reason.¹ Gadamer's use of the metaphor of the horizon deftly describes the reader's relationship to history: the horizon is the total extent of what an individual can envision from a particular point in space and time, and it moves as the individual moves. Accordingly, the process of interpretation is neither wholly objective (concerning impartial facts in the outer world) nor wholly subjective (concerning reflections and opinions in the inner world). The tendency to argue that any sign of subjective preconceptions automatically nullifies an interpretation is thus shown to be based on a misunderstanding of the process. The ideal of a wholly enlightened and rational interpreter is not only unobtainable, it is a fantasy. It is based on a mistaken model of the work being undertaken; it assumes that historical interpretations can be akin to scientific experimental results or mathematical solutions. These kinds of knowledge aim to be formally ahistorical, the one thing that an interpretation of a historical text can never be. Does this mean, then, that all interpretations of texts are simply mind games unrelated to objective reality? Both these misunderstandings, the search for procedural purity on the one hand and the denial of any credibility to rational thought on the other, are beside the point. They both assume that in historical work objective facts and subjective opinions are binary opposites, incapable of blending in a way which might prove valuable. It would be truer to say that they are interdependent and incapable of true separation.

The *horizontverschmelzung* is thus not the fusing of two equal and distinct horizons, the horizon of the present and the horizon of the past. To say this would be to imply that I, the interpreter, could be liberated from both horizons and bring them into a state of fusion under 'laboratory

¹ See Gadamer, 1989:277 (Gadamer, 1975:261).

conditions'. It would be more true to say that the second horizon is made distinct by the re-arrangement of material already known within my horizon, but now re-ordered as if seen from a different vantage point, one from which the text makes sense. The *horizontverschmelzung* is the inevitable (and desirable) clicking back of the projected horizon into a newly-ordered place within my original horizon. The logical consequence of these ideas is a process of interpretation which pays attention to the outer world of texts, artefacts and events and also to the inner world of prejudice and preconception, not with a view to eliminating either one, but to achieving a more adequate interpretation through a reflexive and critical consideration of both. I cannot cease to be a historical being when I make an interpretation, but this does not mean that I have to cease to be a rational one. Tradition and rational enquiry can re-unite in a way that is neither precritical nor modern but which draws on the insights of both approaches.

Enlightenment thought was sceptical of tradition as a source of reliable knowledge because it was based on worn out preconceptions (even superstitions) without a rational basis and was always retrograde. The aim then was to replace tradition with rational investigation. Postmodernism pointed out that 'rational investigation' is limited, culture-bound and contextual. To some this now means that one can no longer trust tradition nor rational investigation, therefore meaning itself is arbitrary and meaningless—a fruitless goal—and play and appearance become all-important. This is still an 'enlightenment' pattern of thought, however, as it accepts the universal claims of rational investigation even while it overthrows them utterly. Perhaps what is needed is a more cautious endorsement of the achievements of rational investigation and the scientific method—while combining this with a recovery of a more favourable understanding of tradition. It must be possible to create a new articulation of the two which would offer a new pathway to understanding, one founded on *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*.

One practical way to become conscious of how one is being 'historically effected' is to examine interpretations of a text made at other times and in other places. Through a process of comparison, similarities and differences emerge which bring to light one's own preconceptions, as well as offering fresh insights. This has happened in two contrasting ways during the course of this project. For instance, it took an examination of the Dura fresco to highlight the prevailing modern western bias towards Peter sinking rather than Peter walking; this insight came through the shock of the unfamiliar. It offered a new balance for an

interpretation, one which would allow verses 28–29 to speak as loudly as verses 30–31. On the other hand, the realization that most present-day interpretations of Mt 14:22–33 follow the interpretative decisions of Schleiermacher and Strauss quite closely could be better described as the shock of the familiar; this led to a clearer apprehension of the sources of our own intellectual heritage. Both kinds of shock offer an opportunity to reassess present-day interpretations by contributing new ideas and inspiring self-reflection.

In this project, ‘effects’ have been studied in two clusters—one based on artefacts and the other on theological texts. Clusters of ‘effects’ were used in this project in order to ensure that individual ‘effects’ could be studied within a wider context. Of course, the way that the clusters themselves were defined shaped the background against which the ‘effects’ were examined. Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation give two examples of different ways in which a cluster can be gathered: the texts in Chapter Four were selected by period and genre—nineteenth-century theological texts; the artefacts in Chapter Five by medium alone—visual ‘effects’ of the text. The advantages of using narrow or broad categories to select a cluster of ‘effects’ will have to be judged from the benefits for interpretation such categories yield. The particular hermeneutical questions which all images provoke plus the relative scarcity of depictions of Mt 14:22–33 made a cluster of visual ‘effects’ spanning more than seventeen centuries a possibility; the number of theological texts recoverable for the same timespan would have made such a cluster impractical and therefore superficial. On the other hand, it would have been possible to narrow both clusters down to, for instance, the work of one or two theologians or artists, but this would have tipped the delicate balance between the descriptive detail about an ‘effect’ and the positive benefits for interpretation. In other words, the result may have been a more detailed appreciation of a particular artist or writer without necessarily producing any enhancement of the interpretative insights gained.

The description and analysis of each cluster has been different also, according to the characteristics of the ‘effects’. The works of art raised general hermeneutical questions about the differences between a text and an image, but they were much too diverse in context to constitute a single history of images. The theological texts, on the other hand, were much closer in time and context, both to each other and to present-day interpreters working within the discipline of New Testament Studies. They were so interwoven within the circles of nineteenth century

theological debate that it would have been misleading to treat them as isolated texts. This raises questions about the versatility of approach which may be required in the examination of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a pericope. If clusters of music, lyrics, jokes, cartoons or proverbial sayings had been examined, they would not only have required specific and particular skills for their analysis, but, according to the range and nature of the 'effects' discovered and the extent of their inter-relationship, they would be suited to different forms of discussion.

This necessary differentiation of technique implies that the task of using the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a pericope as an aid to interpretation will be a complex one. This complexity is unavoidable unless one simply gathers a scrapbook of 'effects', creating a collection which ignores historical and cultural context and therefore is of little value for the very kind of critical reflection which the examination of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* offers. Without the careful and appropriate study of 'effects', it is difficult to engage with the issues which a particular 'effect' raises and allow them to challenge one's interpretative assumptions. The genre of biblical commentary, where a monograph is devoted to the consideration of a complete biblical text, is perhaps a difficult context in which to achieve this.² Projects which are focussed on a narrower range of biblical material³ or on a narrower range of 'effects'⁴ may be more successful; as may projects in which several scholars collaborate across disciplines. Neither a comprehensive compilation of 'effects' nor an exhaustive exploration of a single 'effect' has any merit in itself, unless it facilitates the analytical process of comparison which can both supplement and challenge present-day interpretations of the Bible passage.

This analytical process involves the use of existing methods of exegesis. The gathering and investigation of 'effects' is only one stage in developing an interpretation; another important stage involves the close reading of the biblical text. *Wirkungsgeschichte*, whether it is understood as a philosophical idea or as a practical procedure, does not offer the tools to make such a close reading of the text. It also does not privilege a particular set of critical questions—historical, literary or some other—in such a way that it nullifies all the results obtained by any other

² Both Edwards, 2004 and Thiselton, 2000 suffer from a tendency to list 'effects' rather than discuss them. Luz (e.g. see Luz 1985, 1990), Kovacs and Rowland (Kovacs and Rowland, 2004) have been more successful in discussing 'effects'.

³ E.g. Sherwood, 2000 which considers the short book of Jonah.

⁴ E.g. Mitchell, 2000 which focusses solely on Chrysostom.

method. This is refreshing. For too long in New Testament Studies the introduction of a new approach has been heralded by the attempt to systematically demolish the results obtained by any previous method.⁵ While *Wirkungsgeschichte* draws attention to the unexamined preconceptions which sometimes unduly influence traditional critical results, this is in order to redeem and supplement insights which are based on earlier critical investigations. *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not an independent and rival method but a useful insight into the essential nature of the task of interpreting historical texts. It is an insight which has given birth to a procedure; and this procedure could usefully combine with a number of different critical methods. *Wirkungsgeschichte* can only be construed as independent if it is seen as a new theological method which abandons the close reading of the text in favour of the examination of the impact of the text. As Sawyer, Kovacs and Rowland put it:

—how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant.⁶

One problem with this otherwise innovative and refreshing approach is that it does not give the guiding ideas of *Wirkungsgeschichte* their full rein. The separation of what the Bible “originally meant” from “how people have interpreted it” implies that historical critical investigation and the investigation of “effects” are separate activities. In fact, this impression is confirmed when Kovacs and Rowland point out that historical critical information has not been covered in their commentary as it is readily available in many other works.⁷ While they have a commendable desire not to replicate the investigations of others, this stance could imply that historical critical work is a self-sufficient activity which does not need the corrective insights provided by the examination of the *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Ironically, by treating *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a separate method in its own right, its philosophical claims to provide an insight into the general process of reading are curtailed. If Gadamer is right that the *Wirkungsgeschichte* affects or even conditions interpretation, regardless of whether the interpreter is aware of this influence, then the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text has an important precautionary

⁵ E.g. see Malina, 1996:17, where he dismisses literary critical methods as being to do with grammar not meaning. Also see discussion in Bockmuehl, 1998:274.

⁶ Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:xi.

⁷ See Kovacs and Rowland, 2004:xiv.

and remedial value for any interpreter working in any method. The warning contained in the Catholic document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* underlines this:

Care must be exercised not to privilege one or other stage of the text's influence to such an extent that it becomes the sole interpretation for all time.⁸

This warning is intended for those working with *Wirkungsgeschichte*, but it is much more relevant for those working with traditional critical methods, where the temptation is to privilege the most recent stages of a text's influence while claiming to be objective and impartial.⁹ Until the past is explored, the present remains unseen.

It seems to me that the future of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in Biblical Studies does not lie in establishing it as a new method with its own conventions and practices, but in unleashing it as an important idea which can be explored through a simple procedure, the gathering and comparison of 'effects'. I hope that the implications of this important idea will be explored through many different kinds of interpretation with different emphases and priorities.

AN INTERPRETATION OF MT 14:22–33

During the investigations which have made up the bulk of this project, several key areas of interpretation for this passage have emerged: the framework of expectations which the interpreter brings to such a miracle story, the words and actions of Jesus, the words and actions of Peter, and the role of the Twelve. I have commented on how some of my own assumptions have been challenged through the examination of 'effects' with a contrary viewpoint; now it is time to allow those challenges to inform an enhanced interpretation.

A FRAMEWORK OF EXPECTATIONS

In several significant ways, this pericope is unique. Matthew has made some significant changes to the Markan account: he has added rep-

⁸ Fitzmyer, 1995:81.

⁹ See Gadamer, 1989:301 (Gadamer, 1975:285); "This, precisely, is the power of history over finite human consciousness, namely that it prevails even where faith in method leads one to deny one's own historicity."

etitions, an alternating viewpoint between Jesus and the disciples, an incident with Peter and a confessional conclusion. The miracle itself is unusual, since it cannot be categorized as a healing or helping miracle. It is revelatory rather than therapeutic.

Many interpretations try unsuccessfully to make this pericope more standard or more easily grouped with other Gospel stories, or, failing that, more easily assimilated to other textual traditions. It becomes the second stilling of the storm, with the disciples fearing the danger of the sea; yet it is clear from all three Gospel accounts that it is catching sight of Jesus which terrifies the disciples, not the waves. It becomes a resurrection appearance, which would give an understandable context for the supernatural and epiphanic qualities of Jesus' words and actions; yet no evidence can be put forward except the story's intrinsic strangeness. It becomes something borrowed from another tradition such as the Old Testament books of Job and Psalms, or hellenistic tales of the power of the gods or the actions of Buddha and his disciples; yet none of these suggested sources offer point for point similarities in a way that suggests a conclusive link. Again, it becomes an allegorical story about faith and doubt which comes to a climax with the rescue of the sinking Peter by Jesus; yet such an interpretation ignores the key action of walking on the water and the disciples' confession that Jesus is 'the Son of God'. Why has so much scholarly effort been put into achieving an assimilation? Perhaps the Buddhist scholar Brown speaks for many when he outlines the alternative:

One explanation would be to accept the Gospel accounts as literally true or as being miraculous and uncritical exaggerations of incidents that actually occurred. These ideas do not seem to me to demand our attention.¹⁰

These ideas certainly should demand our attention because one's underlying theological and philosophical beliefs exert such influence on the direction taken in an apparently impartial investigation. If the possibility of this story arising from an event is ruled out, then it becomes necessary to assimilate it to some other source in order to account for its occurrence. The danger in this is less that certain historical questions are left unasked than that the pericope itself is flattened out to fit some pre-existing mould. Only certain features can be considered as significant because other aspects of the passage may not harmonize

¹⁰ Brown, 1923:53.

so well with the proposed source. An example would be Heil's proposal that the motif of Jesus walking on the water arises from a strong tradition of YHWH walking on the water; this high christological claim sits badly with Peter's desire to copy this action. In fact, it makes Peter's demand to join Jesus blasphemous, since Heil is claiming that walking on the water is a clear indication of divinity. It is not surprising that Peter's journey on the water does not figure greatly in Heil's discussion. Assimilation to a source, then, risks the loss of the awkward features in a pericope and tends to divert discussion into the themes which are seen to be common to the source and the passage, rather than to the details of the passage itself. But what if one takes the opposite view to Brown, and begins with an easy-going predisposition to accept Gospel accounts of miracles as historically factual? I began this project with this type of view; not for me a Straussian sense of the absurd or a Schleiermacherian reaction of embarrassment. Yet this attitude robbed me of some stimulating questions which the scepticism and struggles of others have brought to light, such as: is it possible to maintain a picture of Jesus as fully human in the light of this story? Why would Jesus walk on the water, even if he could? The story does raise some awkward questions and it is exceptional, both in form and content. Therefore it is important to allow this story to speak, to allow it to stimulate new ideas, not simply to reflect ones developed elsewhere; in short, to allow it to be mysterious or even unattractive, rather than to shoehorn it into existing categories of thought, sceptical or accepting.

JESUS

The figure of Jesus in this pericope is magisterial and imposing. He compelled (ἠνάγκασεν) his disciples to leave him so that he could return to solitary prayer (cf. 14:13). When he sees his disciples troubled by a contrary wind, he does not make the sea calm, but walks towards them on the water. The text offers no comment on this extraordinary action, except to emphasize it with a repetition (see verses 25 and 26). When he walks on the water he terrifies his disciples who scream (ἔκραξαν) at the sight of him, sure that he must be some supernatural being (φάντασμα) and not a person. Their initial reaction is not to assume that they are seeing God (which one would expect if walking on the water were an established theophanic tradition) but to be thrown into a state of fear and confusion, certain that they are witnessing something outside the natural realm, but unsure of its benevolence.

When Jesus speaks, he not only reassures his disciples of his identity but echoes the LXX designation for God (ἐγώ εἰμι). We do not have to read this as a direct claim to divinity to understand that the identity and even the essential nature of Jesus is being explored in the astonishing details of this story. He is Jesus, but not the Jesus the disciples thought they knew. He is doing an action reputed to belong to the actions of the pagan gods, perhaps known to the disciples (and the first readers) through popular stories, yet alien to their own religious tradition.

Walking on the water is a powerful and marvellous action, completely outside the scope of normal behaviour. It is easy to see why some depictions of this scene such as the *Navicella* show Jesus as an essentially eschatological figure with a frontal pose to the viewer, standing in majesty, bringing a rescue with much wider implications than protection in a storm. The storm itself recalls the wind, the darkness and the deep which form the scenery of the story of creation (Genesis 1:1–2) and of the crossing of the Reed Sea (Exodus 14:20), pivotal moments of creation and redemption in Old Testament tradition. The figure who strides across the waves and says ἐγώ εἰμι suggested to these artists and their patrons theological connections with the one “who is to come” (Revelation 1:17–18) and whose coming will transform all things (Revelation 21:1–6). The dynamic action of this story underlines a key christological theme¹¹ which runs through Matthew’s Gospel, beginning in 1:23 when Jesus is called Emmanuel and coming to a climax in 28:20 when he tells his disciples καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. This theme of presence is enacted here as Jesus comes to his disciples (ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτούς, verse 25) across the waves, as if to emphasize that his brief period of solitary prayer is now over and he resumes his mission to be with his disciples. Matthew’s Christology of presence comes alive in the actions of Jesus in this central section of the Gospel.

Yet Schleiermacher’s influential objections to this story need to be considered: how does this figure striding on the waves, supernatural in appearance, have any claim to be seen as completely human? Is there not a danger that his human nature is undermined by such a display of divine glory? Part of the answer to this question lies in how one defines the nature of being human. Trench and Westcott offered the interesting suggestion that walking on the water is only alien to fallen

¹¹ See Luz, 1995:32; Kupp, 1996.

human nature; that a human being fully alive would be able to walk on the water, thus making the action not alien but archetypal to what it means to be human. It is an action of innocence, simplicity, and oneness with God, rather than an action that proves divine power. Of course, Trench and Westcott were motivated by their own particular cultural circumstances to suggest this interpretation, but it has the merit of offering an alternative perspective on this theological question of Jesus' humanity. It also provides a way of understanding the words and actions of Peter, which an interpretation based solely on the revelation of Jesus' divinity does not.

PETER

It is unhelpful to begin a discussion of Peter's words and actions with a presumption that this addition to the Markan and Johannine pericopae is of minimal importance because it probably does not belong to the earliest tradition. On the contrary, Matthew's introduction of this material suggests that he considered it important; important enough to depart from the Markan pattern. It is also unhelpful to assume that Peter is an impetuous character, since this prejudices the nature of his words and actions. Some commentators seem frustrated with Peter, impatient with his contribution to what otherwise would have been a more straightforward epiphany. Others seize on his words and actions as a way to focus their interpretation on issues of discipleship and faith, rather than on such an audacious miracle. A balanced interpretation of Mt 14:22–33 should hold together the words and actions of both Jesus and Peter allowing each to shed light on the other.

When Peter hears the words of Jesus (verse 27), he responds not with worship but with a demand. It is fruitless to argue about whether this is motivated by doubt or by faith, whether he is testing Jesus ("Lord, if it is you...") or responding with faith ("Lord, since it is you..."); what is clear is that there is an element of hesitancy in what Peter is saying. The subordinate clause suggests that he is coming to a new realisation of who Jesus is; he is not able to say simply, "Lord, command me to come to you on the water," rather he needs the extra thinking space implied in the clause εἰ σὺ εἶ. Jesus' decisive one word response, ἐλθέ, contrasts with this. Yet it is important to notice that the word of Jesus is dependent on the words of Peter. This is a conversation in which Peter has taken the lead by demanding that Jesus would command him, and

Jesus has responded positively. Some Patristic commentators, perhaps concerned that Jesus appeared to be losing the initiative at this point, or could seem unaware that this attempt would end in failure, are anxious to assert that Jesus foreknew the result of Peter's efforts but chose to allow him to fail in order to teach him a lesson.¹² I feel that it is this interpretation, not the action of walking on the water, that threatens to compromise a depiction of Jesus as truly human. This conversation, as Matthew tells it, is open-ended; Peter has initiated a new phase in this story, and Jesus has allowed him to do it. Jesus is not a shadowy quasi-divine figure making an appearance to offer a pre-determined revelation; there is a genuine master-disciple relationship between the two men in which Peter's ideas change the course of events.

The artefacts depicting the next section of the story draw attention to three distinct moments worthy of note: the moment that Peter responds to Jesus' command and moves to leave the boat, the moment that Peter walks on the water, and the moment that he begins to sink and is rescued by Jesus. Peter hears Jesus' command, ἐλθέ, and he obeys. Speaking, hearing and acting become one in his desire to participate in this miracle. The idea that Peter does walk on the water before he sinks is a significant one. It suggests that the action of walking on the water is not first and foremost a sign of divine status but something which rests on a relationship with the divine; it is possible for Peter to replicate the actions of Jesus because Jesus calls him. Jesus is not inviting him to participate in an epiphany but to share in a miracle of trust, an intimate fellowship.

Of course, it is also significant that Peter becomes afraid and begins to sink. He uses the title κύριε in a new way, as almost a prayer, κύριε, σῶσόν με. Peter fails in a way that perhaps foreshadows his later denial of Jesus (Mt 26:58, 69–75). In this story, too, he begins by journeying with Jesus but then becomes afraid and is unable to continue. Peter's heightened use of the title κύριε does emphasize Jesus' role as the one who saves, a more recognisably divine role in Old Testament tradition¹³ than the more obscure action of walking on the water. Perhaps the nineteenth century illustrators were right to choose this encapsulating

¹² E.g. see Chrysostom, Homily L; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, Book XI, chapters 5 + 6.

¹³ E.g. see 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:46; Isaiah 43:11; Jeremiah 14:8; Hosea 13:4, etc.

moment to inspire devotion to Jesus as the Saviour. Unfortunately, this emphasis detracted from the task of interpreting the moment when both Jesus and Peter were walking; it excluded any consideration of the more eastern notion that Peter was sharing or participating in the divine life. A more adequate interpretation of this pericope calls for a combination of East and West: a sense of Peter's union with Jesus as well as his failure and, undergirding both, a sense of the genuine participation of Jesus and Peter in a conversation of plea and response, action and reaction.

Peter begins and ends this pericope as one of the general group of disciples. The way that he emerges from, and re-merges with, the collective character of the disciples suggests that he does play a representative role. Something of what it means to be a disciple is reflected in verses 28–31, but it is not a generalised lesson about faith and doubt so much as a poignant portrayal of a mutual relationship with its strengths and its failures.

THE DISCIPLES

The disciples twice identify Jesus in this passage: first wrongly and with great fear (verse 26) and then rightly as they prostrate themselves in the boat (verse 33). Depictions such as the Dura fresco and the *Navicella* remind us that they are also active observers of the events of verses 28–31, so that even while the narration describes an exchange between Peter and Jesus, the disciples as a group are still present. This suggests that the confession of verse 33, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ, is not only a response to seeing Jesus walk on the water but also to seeing Jesus enable Peter to walk and seeing Jesus rescue Peter when he begins to sink. When they prostrate themselves before Jesus, not to petition him but simply to honour him, they echo the actions performed in two other stories,¹⁴ one near the beginning of Matthew's Gospel and one near the end. In Mt 2:11, the Magi prostrate themselves before

¹⁴ προσκυνέω occurs 13 times in Matthew. Five times the action is accompanied by a request: 8:2, 9:18, 15:25, 18:26 and 20:20. Three instances are part of the story of the Magi: 2:2, 2:8 and 2:11. Two occur in the dialogue in the temptation narrative: 4:9 and 4:10. Two occur in the resurrection narratives: 28:9 and 28:17. The other occurrence is in this pericope. The examples which indicate worship or homage because they do not involve a request are therefore clustered at the beginning and end of the Gospel and with one example at this midpoint.

the infant Jesus (προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ); in Mt 28:9 the women bow down and grasp Jesus' feet (προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ) and then in Mt 28:17, the disciples prostrate themselves before the risen Christ (αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν). Just as with the christological theme of presence, this theme of homage or worship seems to be reinforced in this pericope, at a stage close to the midpoint of the Gospel. The NRSV translates προσεκύνησαν as 'they knelt down and paid him homage,' in Mt 2:11, but as 'worshipped' in this passage and in Mt 28:17, perhaps suggesting that the intention that accompanies the physical action grows as the Gospel progresses. Here it is accompanied by the words ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ, a phrase which will sound familiar when the Centurion speaks beneath the cross in Mt 27:54. This confession is the climax of Mt 14:22–33, and should not be silenced in favour of a discussion of whether miracles ever happened or in a misguided attempt to trim Matthew's pericope back to the dimensions of its Markan prototype. The disciples have seen a marvel (verse 25), heard a revelation (verse 27), witnessed a commanding invitation (verse 29) and seen a rescue (verse 31) and their response is, ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ. The phrase θεοῦ υἱός should not be taken as equivalent to θεῖος ἀνὴρ, a reaction to one who has divine power to work miracles, but as a response to the whole series of events which, in the disciples' eyes, show their master to be someone in the mould of God's character.

In this pericope, Jesus comes near in terrifyingly supernatural power, yet also listens and responds, making himself available for what Peter wants to do. Far from being simply an enacted revelation, planned as a show of power, this miracle provides the context for conversation, challenge and confession. The objection that this miracle is not therapeutic ignores the larger theme of transformation which unfolds as Peter, the archetypal disciple, is permitted to share in a previously inconceivable communion. This story is linked with the feeding of the five thousand in the earliest extant Christian traditions, perhaps because it can also be seen as alluding to the Eucharist by depicting Jesus as the one who comes. Matthew has strengthened this theme: Jesus is not only the one who comes in power but also the one who invites his disciples to share in the divine life with him and rescues them when they falter.

Do these theological themes of presence, encounter and rescue have their origin in a historical event? There is no reliable way to establish the answer to this question. The episode with Peter is less likely to be historical because it does not appear in the earliest traditions represented

in Mark and John. The core story of Jesus walking on the water is unfathomable by historical means. Many commentators show a marked preference for concluding that the story is not based on an event, but this judgment is rooted in pre-understandings about what is physically possible and about the kinds of actions they believe that Jesus would have done. It is not based on evidence. It would be interesting to know whether or not this story has a historical basis, as this would clarify whether it is solely a christological composition of the Early Church or whether it carries a grain of Jesus' own character.

Where do I stand in this significant but elusive guessing game? I can only affirm the sentiments of Thomas Hardy in his poem *The Oxen*; if someone told me that Jesus was walking on the water now, "I should go with him in the gloom, hoping it might be so."¹⁵ And I would speak about what I saw, joining the two millennia of interpreters who have pictured this scene; I would even hope to hear one word spoken to me, ἐλθέ.

¹⁵ *The Oxen* by Thomas Hardy.

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.

"Now they are all on their knees,"

An elder said as we sat in a flock

By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where

They dwelt in their strawy pen,

Nor did it occur to one of us there

To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave

In these years! Yet, I feel,

If someone said on Christmas Eve,

"Come; see the oxen kneel."

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb

Our childhood used to know,"

I should go with him in the gloom,

Hoping it might be so.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to illustrate the positive benefits for exegesis of examining the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a pericope. It is my contention that tracing the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a pericope is not an independent method in NT studies, but rather a procedure which can supplement existing methods. The introductory chapter to this dissertation discusses the concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* against its philosophical background and discusses the implications and practicalities of including the examination of 'effects' in the process of interpretation.

This is followed by two traditional critical examinations: Chapter Two is a historical critical study and Chapter Three a literary critical investigation. These discussions yield some results helpful in making an interpretation of Mt 14:22–33. They also raise a number of unanswered questions, both about the passage itself and about the conventional critical approaches used by present-day New Testament scholars in its interpretation. Chapters Four and Five analyse two particular clusters of 'effects': Chapter Four discusses how the story is understood in some nineteenth-century theological texts and Chapter Five reflects on six works of art. The 'effects' have been examined in these two clusters to avoid the superficial approach which would arise if 'effects' were gathered randomly from throughout the reception history of the passage.

The conclusion to this project offers a *Wirkungsgeschichte*-enriched interpretation of this passage, incorporating insights gained from the examination of 'effects'. The compilation of 'effects' is not a merely academic pursuit, but an active supplement to traditional methods of exegesis. These narratives were oral stories before they were ever texts and they arguably live on most powerfully in a post-textual form: in memories, sermons and artefacts. Examining the *Wirkungsgeschichte* offers the possibility of both enriching an interpretation with additional insights and fruitfully alerting us to the narrowness of the vision of our own time and place.

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SUBJECT AND AUTHOR INDEX

- abstract art 175–176, 210
 academic vs. confessional 15, 16, 17,
 19, 22, 23, 68, 78, 125, 127
 allegory, allegorical 46, 49, 70, 84,
 122, 126, 164, 165, 168, 193
 altarpiece, altarpiece panel 153–161,
 163, 168, 170, 171, 174, 180, 207
 alternating viewpoint 96, 193
 Apollonius 56, 57, 60, 204
 aretology 59–60
 artefact 2, 9, 15, 18, 19, 21, 101, 128,
 133–134, 147, 155, 171, 188, 189,
 197
 assumptions 9, 14, 15, 21, 24, 67, 79,
 138, 190, 192
 Augustine 22, 34, 118, 150–153, 164,
 169, 203

 baptism, baptismal laver 36, 60, 63,
 106, 137–140, 143, 164, 185, 204
 Barth, G. 92, 205
 Barth, K. 8, 204
 βίαι, Graeco-Roman 76, 78, 205
 Bornkamm, G. 29, 30, 62, 67, 205
 Borrassá, L. 170–174, 184
 Buddha, buddhist 33, 47, 53–57, 62,
 68, 69, 70, 96, 193
 Burridge, R. 76, 78, 205

 Catechetical Discourses 137, 138, 140,
 203
 character 11, 23, 73, 74–79, 82,
 89–94, 129, 130, 142, 179, 183, 184,
 196, 198, 199, 200, 212
 characterization 88–89, 94, 211
 chiasm, chiastic 34, 37, 88
 Christ as eschatological figure 165,
 166, 169, 185, 195
 Christology, christological 23, 34, 42,
 45, 47, 59–61, 69, 78, 95, 96, 100,
 111, 112, 115, 116, 126, 182, 185,
 194, 195, 199, 200, 206, 208
 Chrysostom 5, 35, 57, 58, 190, 197,
 203, 210
 clusters of ‘effects’ 21, 26, 189, 190
 coherence 63–64, 66, 99, 121, 158
 context
 historical 153
 geographical 135, 145
 cultural 20, 95, 190
 philosophical 67
 eucharistic 156
 criteria 3, 20–21, 23, 25, 33, 62–67,
 71, 211, 213
 Cyril of Jerusalem 137, 138, 140, 203

 Davies, W. and Allison, D. 34, 38, 39,
 41, 42, 44, 48, 50, 61, 67–69, 83, 84,
 88, 90, 95, 122, 124, 167
 Descartes 30
 devotion, devotional 12, 16, 130, 131,
 154, 155, 161, 168, 171, 176, 182,
 183, 184, 198
 dialectic 5, 64
 dialogue 3, 14, 57, 67, 79, 101, 131,
 132, 144, 150, 157, 183, 198
 difference, historical 15
 divine man 33, 41, 56, 59–61, 68, 69,
 70, 185, 205
 divinity of Jesus, divine 39, 41, 49, 65,
 69, 95, 111–112, 118, 121, 194–196,
 199
 Dodd, C.H. 31, 43, 45, 61, 100, 148,
 206
 doubt 30, 68, 70, 74, 91–95, 109, 113,
 144, 146, 161, 169, 182, 183, 193,
 196, 198, 200
 Duccio 146, 153, 154–161, 163,
 171, 184, 185, 205, 208, 210, 212,
 213
 Dura Europus 134, 135, 137, 139,
 144, 183, 184, 185, 188, 198

 ‘effect’ 3–9, 11–14, 16, 17, 19–27,
 33, 72, 95, 99–101, 103, 105–107,
 109–113, 115, 117, 119, 121, 123,
 125, 126, 127, 129, 131–135, 137,
 139, 141, 142, 174, 183, 189–192,
 205, 209, 211
 embarrassment 63, 116, 121, 194
 Enlightenment 9, 10, 30, 71, 99, 110,
 188
 Ephraim 137–139, 215
 epiphany 38, 44, 45, 47, 48, 69, 196,
 197, 203
 epistemological 118

- exegesis 5, 17, 18, 24–25, 27, 84, 96,
 105, 116, 118, 120, 125, 190, 209,
 212
- Farrar, F. 100, 104, 108–111, 207
 figurative (art) 175
 Forster, E.M. 75, 77–78, 207
 fresco, frescoes 128, 132, 134–144,
 148, 150, 158, 174, 183–185, 188,
 198, 209
- Gadamer, H.-G. 3, 6–16, 27, 71, 76,
 134, 187, 191, 192, 207
 Gardner-Smith, P. 43, 207
 Giotto 132, 158, 161–162, 164–166,
 168, 185, 204, 206, 209, 210, 213
- harmony 100, 102–104, 106–109, 115,
 117, 119–120, 143, 152, 179, 203
 Hawking, S. 119, 206
 Heil, J. 34, 45, 47–50, 52, 61, 69, 86,
 122, 124, 194, 208
 hellenistic 33, 47, 48, 56–62, 68, 70,
 76, 96, 123, 135, 193
 hermeneutics 5, 7–8, 12, 15, 207, 208,
 211
 historical questions 17, 29, 30, 68, 75
 Historical Jesus 29, 33, 67, 68, 121,
 122
 historical difference, distance 8, 13, 15,
 18, 19, 133, 134
 horizon 7–12, 15, 20, 24, 27, 134,
 152, 187–188, 213
Horizontverschmelzung (fusion of
 horizons) 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 27,
 187, 188
- icons 160, 175–180, 210
 iconography 148, 149, 150, 158, 165,
 166, 207, 209
 implied author 73, 75
 interpretation, history of 3–5, 14, 15,
 17, 21
- Jataka 190 53–55, 57, 206
 Jauss, H. 5–6, 19, 208
 Johannine independence 43
- Kandinsky, W. 175–179, 205, 208,
 209
 Kempe, M. 130, 212
 Kingsbury, J. 1, 18, 38, 73, 74, 76, 78,
 79, 93, 208
 Kovacs, J. 4, 22, 23, 25, 190, 191, 209
- laws of nature 103, 107–110
 Lessing, G. 128–129, 131, 142, 144,
 209
 literature, literary 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12,
 16, 18, 20, 57, 62, 74, 203, 204, 207,
 208, 212, 213
 life (lives) of Jesus 64, 67, 100, 105,
 111, 209, 210, 211, 212
 Lucian 61, 204
 Luz, U. 3, 4, 14–17, 20–23, 35, 36,
 38, 47, 48, 92, 93, 123, 167, 170,
 190, 195, 205, 209
- Maestà* 153–158, 163, 205
 Masaccio 132, 172
 Master of Cabestany 145–152, 185,
 209
 Meier, J. 31, 44, 47, 50, 59, 61–65,
 67–69, 120–122, 124–125, 204, 210
 method 1, 2, 3, 5–7, 13, 14, 18, 19,
 23–26, 29, 42, 62, 67, 74, 75, 77,
 79, 100, 120, 133, 156, 187, 188,
 190–192, 207, 208
 misunderstanding 75, 187
 mosaic 150, 161–169, 205, 206, 210
 Mother of God 148, 154, 155, 177
 multiple attestation 63, 65, 66
 mystery 81, 99, 102, 106, 115, 119,
 182
 myth 48, 49, 69, 71, 103–106,
 122–124, 175, 181–182
- Navicella* 135, 161–163, 166–170,
 183–185, 195, 198, 209, 210, 213
 narrative work of art 129, 130
 narrative space 81–83
 narratology 77
 narrator 73–75, 79–81, 83, 85, 86, 87,
 91, 92, 94
 nature miracles 110, 114, 121, 210
 New Testament Studies 1, 12, 13, 19,
 25, 122, 189, 191, 206, 208, 212
 Newman, B. 177
 Newton, newtonian 30, 103
 non-figurative art 175–177
- objective 12, 16, 29, 30, 119, 121,
 187, 192
 Origen 35, 39, 59, 197, 204
 Ouspensky, L. and Lossky, V. 175, 177,
 178, 179, 210
- Peter, Saint 11–12, 17, 19, 22, 38–41,
 45, 47, 50, 52, 53, 57, 62, 66, 68, 70,

- 80, 81, 82, 87, 88–96, 104, 105, 106,
109, 120, 122, 126, 131, 132, 136,
140, 142–146, 149, 150, 152, 153,
155, 156, 158–170, 172–174,
179–186, 188, 192–194, 196–199,
213
piti (faith) 53–54
point of view 78, 79, 82, 108, 115,
135
Pope, papal 163, 165, 167, 170
postmodern 1, 3, 71, 181, 182, 188
preconceptions in interpretation 71,
122, 187, 188
pre-Gospel 32, 35, 43–44, 59, 60, 68
pre-Markan 44, 66, 204
pre-understanding 17, 21, 24, 200

rational 30, 71, 72, 125, 187, 188
rationalistic exegesis 120
reader-response 73, 74, 79
redaction 29, 30, 31, 68, 75, 84, 122,
207
Reed Sea 49–52, 86, 195
repetition(s) 40, 74, 79, 83, 84, 86–88,
94, 95, 144, 194
Rezeptionsästhetik 5
reductionist 18
Rothko, M. 175–177, 206, 211
Rowland, C. 4, 22, 23, 25, 190, 191,
209

Saj, C. 134, 135, 175, 179–185
Schleiermacher, F. 29, 100–102,
111–116, 118, 121, 124, 125, 144,
189, 194, 195, 212
Septuagint, septuagintal 37, 50
setting 8, 18, 21, 22, 34, 38, 78, 79,
81, 83–84, 129, 135, 136, 145, 154,
158, 165, 173, 178
Siena 153, 154–155, 158, 210
social-scientific 1, 2, 18
sociological 1, 2, 18, 19, 25, 205, 212
sources 2, 16, 18, 20, 24, 27, 29–33,
42–44, 47, 48, 55, 57, 59, 61, 62,
65–66, 68, 69, 75, 86, 93, 101–103,
116, 122, 124, 151, 152, 157, 158,
162, 168, 183, 189, 193, 204
Steiner, G. 8, 15, 20, 212
Strauss, D. 29, 101–107, 109,
110–113, 115, 116, 121–126, 189,
194, 209, 212
subjective 12, 79, 187
supernatural 54, 61, 94, 101, 104–107,
115, 121, 155, 193, 194, 195, 199
symbols 83, 130, 134, 151, 156, 175
symbolism 84, 138, 140, 143, 164
symbolic 31, 36, 52, 58, 83–84, 104,
137, 140, 169

tempera 103, 120, 153, 170
Thiselton, A. 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 17, 19,
190, 213
time, narrated 79, 85–86
tradition, traditional 2, 3, 5, 9–12, 15,
16, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31, 32,
40, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 54,
55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66,
68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79,
80, 84, 89, 99, 101, 103, 105, 109,
111, 114, 115, 118, 123, 124, 130,
135, 137, 138, 140, 144, 148, 149,
157, 159, 160, 163, 164, 170, 171,
175, 177, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183,
184, 185, 187, 188, 191, 192, 193,
194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 205, 206,
207, 208, 209, 211
truth 7, 23, 30, 31, 68, 102, 103, 104,
175, 207

Westcott, B. 99, 102, 104, 116–118,
126, 195, 196, 213
Wirkungsgeschichte 1, 3–9, 12–14, 16–19,
21, 23–27, 71, 96, 97, 101, 127, 131,
134, 135, 163, 174, 175, 190–192
wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein 8, 13,
20, 24, 188

YHWH 33, 42, 45, 48–50, 52, 69, 194

BIBLICAL INDEX

Genesis		Ecclesiastes	
1:1–2	51, 62, 86, 195	12:12	88
Exodus		Isaiah	
14:19–22	122	27:1	48
14:20	195	41:4	37
14:20–21	51, 52, 62	43:10	37
14:24	52	43:11	197
16:4	93	43: 15–16	49
Numbers		47:8; 10	37
11:32	9	51:9–10	48, 49, 52
Joshua		51:9–15	52
24:7	52	53:11–12	60
2 Samuel		Jeremiah	
22:3	197	14:8	197
Job		Ezekiel	
9:8	48, 49, 50, 122	29:3	48
Psalms		32:2	48
7:1 (LXX 7:2)	41	Hosea	
18:15	52	13:4	197
22:21 (LXX 21:22)	41	Amos	
31:16 (LXX 30:17)	41	5:16–17	45
40:5	151	7:3	45
54:1 (LXX 53:3)	41	7:6	45
55	151	7:8	45
66:6	52	Jonah	
69:1 (LXX 68:2)	41	1:9	52
71:2 (LXX 70:2)	41	Matthew	
74:13	52	1:1–9:34	74
77:19	52	2:11	198
78:13; 53	52	4:8	83
89:9	52	4:18–20	173
93:4	52	4:19	161
94	151	5:1	83
95:5	52	5:33–37	17
106: 7, 9, 22	52	6:30	93
109:26 (LXX 108:26)	41	8:3	91
119:94 (LXX 118:94)	41	8:6	36
136:13	52	8:25	41, 49
146:6	52	8:26	49
148:7	52	8:28–34	86
Proverbs		8:29	36
8:29	52	9:2–8	83

9:6	91	26:30	83
9:8	65	26:34	85
9:9–10	88	26:36–37	82
9:18	83	26:39	82
9:23–25	82	26:40	82, 85
9:33–34	65	26:56	82
9:35–11:1	74	26:47	85
10:1	91	26:47–50	88
11:2–28:20	74	26:55	85
11:21–23	65	26:58	197
12:10	80	26:58–27:5	82
12:11	81	26:74–75	85
12:28	65	27:1	85
12:32	151	27:20	85
14:2	61	27:45	85
14:13	33	27:51	85
14:22–33	26, 31, 32, 33, 49, 51, 68, 72, 74, 79, 81, 82, 84, 87, 88, 95, 99, 100, 120, 122, 123, 126, 131, 135, 140, 146, 150, 161, 163, 169, 174, 175, 189, 192–200	27:53	77, 199
14:22	33–35, 92	27:54	42
14:23	83, 84, 92	27:57	85
14:24	35–36	27:62	85
14:25	50, 92, 105	27:62	85
14:27	36–38	27:64	85
14:28	38–39	28:1	85
14:28–31	53, 55, 96	28:9	199
14:28–29	120	28:11	85
14:29	39–40, 56, 149, 182	28:15	85
14:29–30	156	28:16	83
14:29–33	57	28:17	199
14:30–31	174		
14:30	40–41	Mark	
14:31	92	1:17	161
14:33	41–42, 48	3:5	80
15:29	83	3:17	89
15:39	33	5:1–20	86
16:14	61	5:37	82
16:15–19	22	6:45–52	91
16:16	48	6:47–52	43
16:18	17	6:48	36, 45, 81, 86
17:1	83, 85	6:49	86
17:1–8	82, 85	6:52	93
17:12	92	8:10	33
17:22	92	8:17	93
19:28	92	8:21	93
21:1	83	9:4	88
25:35–39	86	9:5	88, 92
25:42–44	86	9:6	81
26:14–16	88	9:7	88
26:20	85	13	66
		Luke	
		6:8	80
		6:10	80
		8:51	82
		9:32–33	81

12:28	93	21:1-8	146, 156
14:23	34	21:1-14	123
24:37	82	21:2-7	160
		21:7	105
John		Romans	
6	2	6:4	138
6:14-15	34		
6:15-16	34	1 Corinthians	4
6:16-21	42, 43, 82	1:23	60
6:17	45, 81		
6:19	35	Revelation	
6:21	81	1:17-18	195
21	150	21:1-6	195
21:1-7	158, 159		

ILLUSTRATIONS



Illustration 1: Walking on Water fresco fragment Z116 Dura-Europus Collection Yale University Art Gallery.



Illustration 2: Tracing of Walking on Water, Henry Pearson drawing Y2232 Dura-Europus Collection. Yale University Art Gallery.



Illustration 3: The marble bas relief by the Master of Cabestany. By kind permission of the Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona.

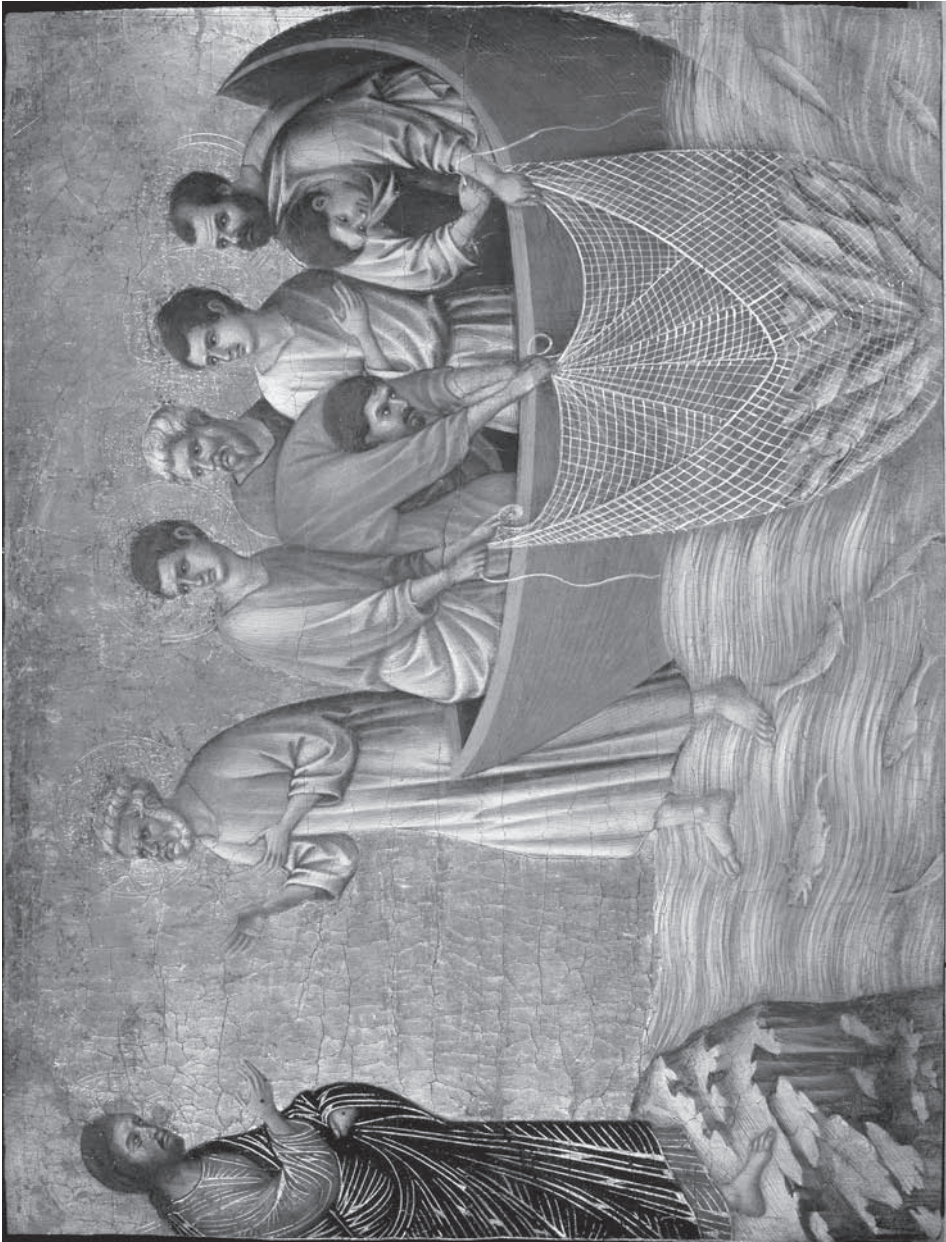


Illustration 4: Duccio's *Appearance on Lake Tiberias*. By kind permission of the Fabbrica di San Pietro.



Illustration 5: The *Navicella* mosaic, St. Peter's, Rome. Foto Lensini, Siena. By kind permission of the Opera della Metropolitana, Siena. Authorisation number 615/07.

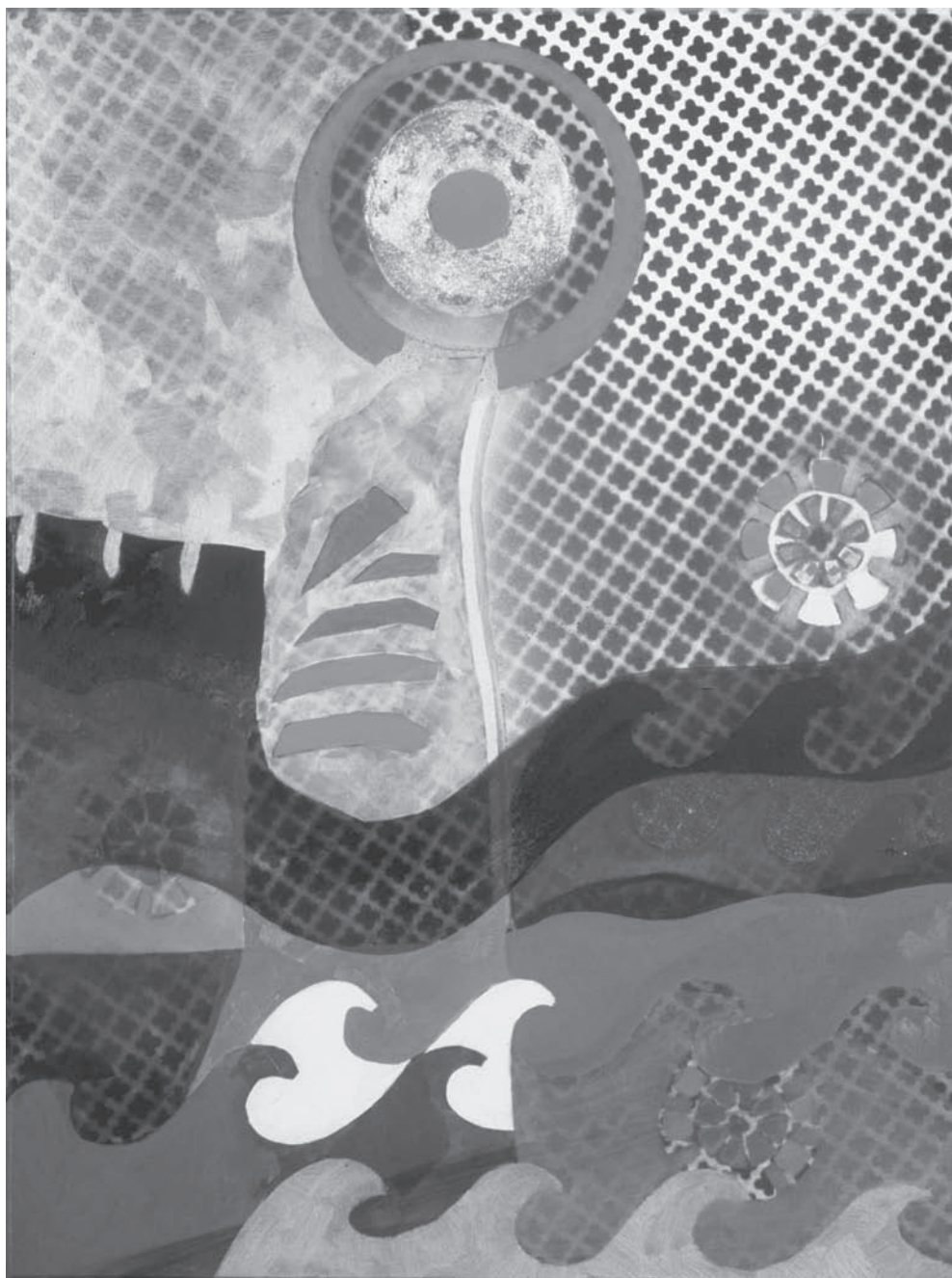


Illustration 6: Christina Saj's *Walking on Water*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist.

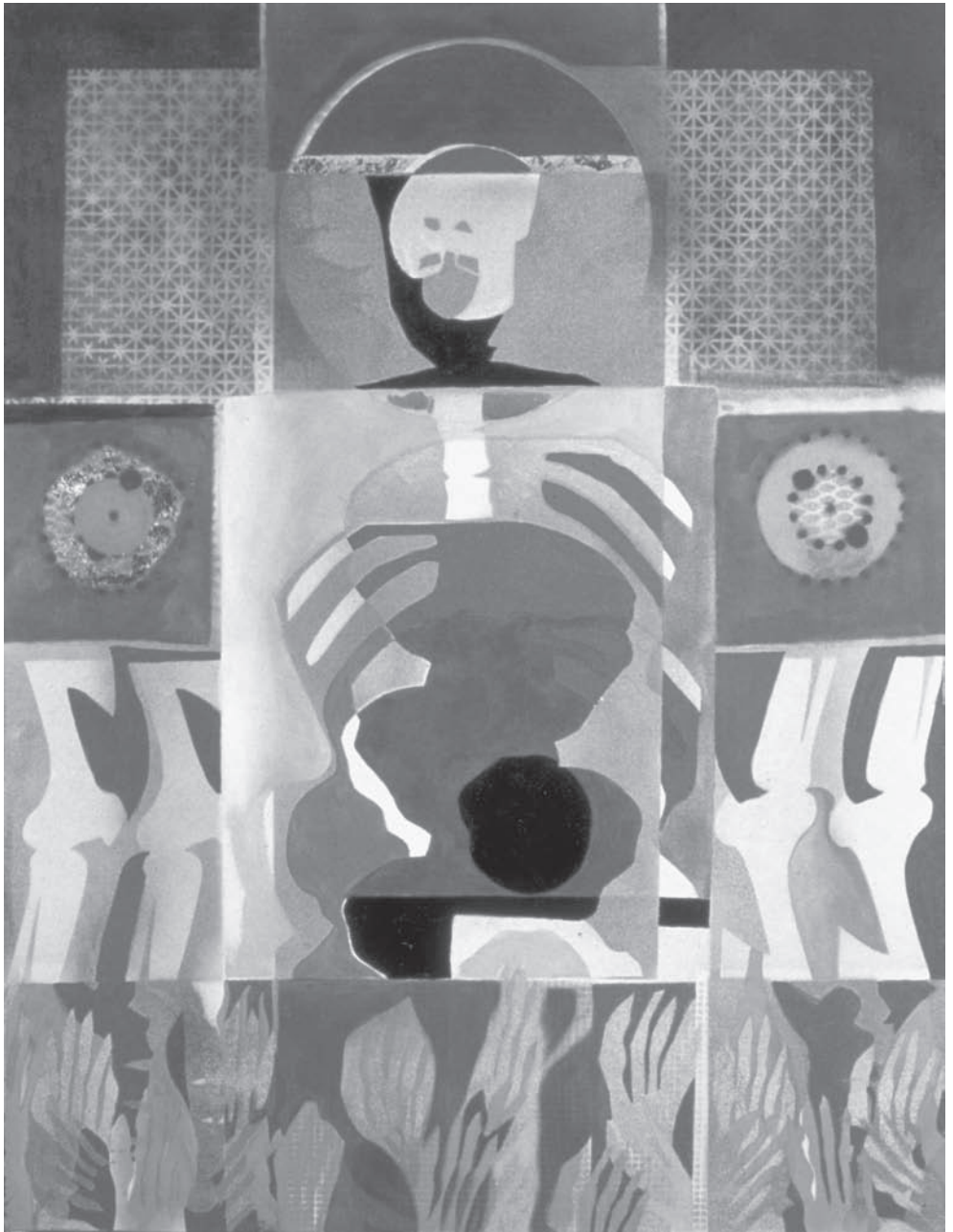


Illustration 7: *Jonah in the Belly of the Beast*, 1994. Courtesy of the artist.



Illustration 8: *Don Quixote - the Barefoot Warrior*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist.

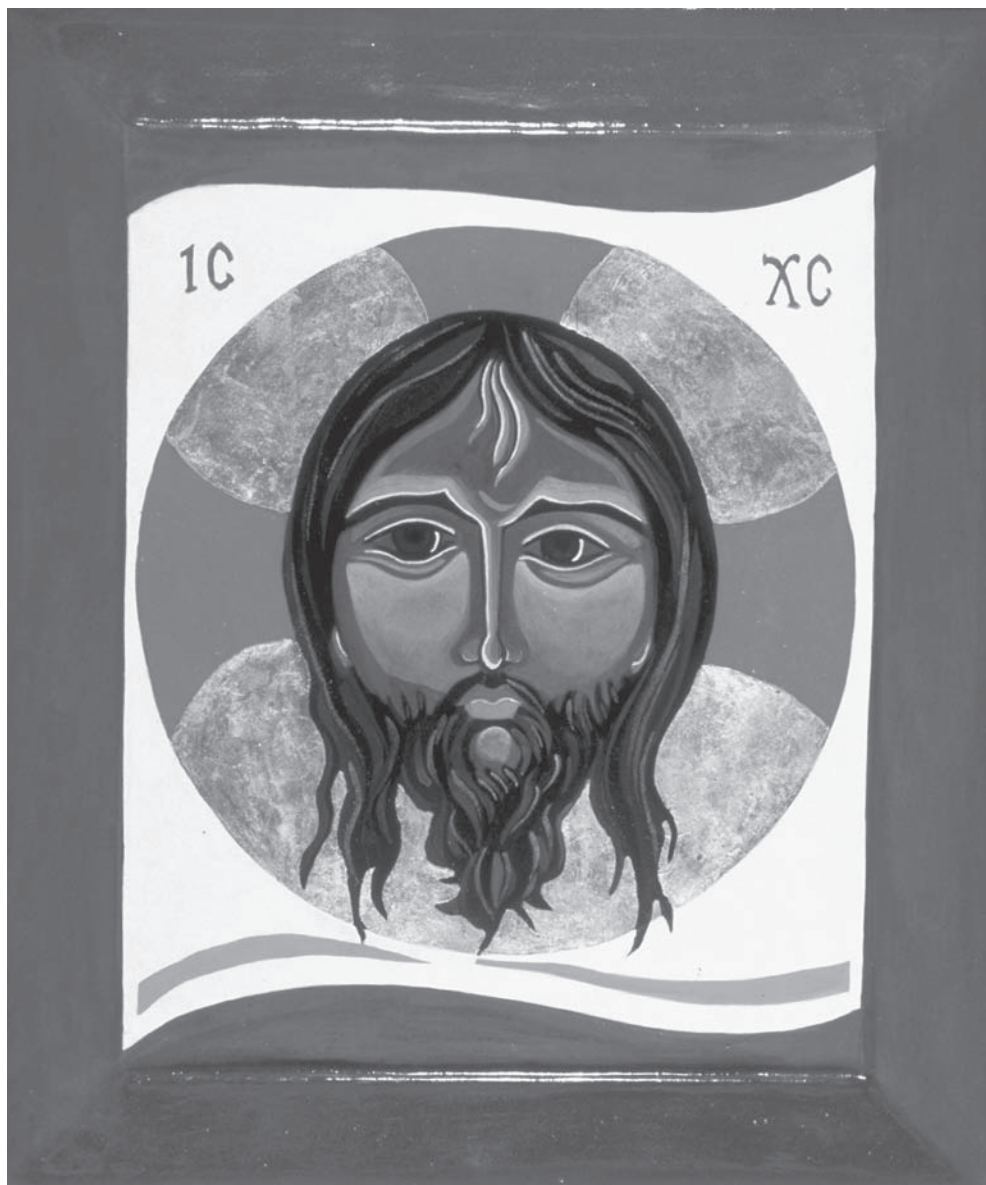


Illustration 9: *Nerukotvorna* “not made by human hands”, 1998. Courtesy of the artist.



Illustration 10: *Transfiguration*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist.



Illustration 11: *Descent into Limbo*, 1999. Courtesy of the artist.